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Vol. I

CAPTAIN TOM DRAKE; OR, The Young Privateers.

By H. C. EMMET,

Author of "Shadow Ship," "Adrift on a Floating Island," "Tom Trump," "Mark Graham," etc., etc.



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OR,

THE YOUNG PRIVATEERS.

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CHAPTER I.

OUR HERO.

"I TELL you, madame, the young scamp shall be packed off at once. Confound him! I won't put up with his tricks any longer; he's always at mischief. He shall go."

"But, Gregory—"

"Don't Gregory me. He shall pack off to sea, I'm determined."

"He is so young."

"Young—fiddlesticks! he's old enough to be always in some confounded mess or other. He's a perfect torment, and I won't stand it any longer."

Mr. John Gregory—Old Gregory, he was usually called—sat in his breakfast parlor; his head was swathed in bandages, his feet were rolled up in blankets, his nose was red and swollen like a large beet-root, his eyes were bunged up with neuralgia, and each foot was the size of two with the gout.

As he addressed these testy words to the lady who was seated at the table, a sudden wrench of his two continuous visitants—gout and lumbago—sent him back puffing and panting in his easy chair.

The lady, who was no other than Mrs. Drake, the mother of our hero, remained silent after he had spoken. She was evidently used to him, and knew how useless it would be to attempt to alter his determination.

Mrs. Drake was Gregory's own sister; he had a half-sister, who was also married, and, like Mrs. Drake, had a child—a boy, who was named Reuben.

Between the two half-sisters there had never been much affection.

Mrs. Drake was lady-like, generous, and gentle at heart.

Her half-sister was proud and designing; she had striven to obtain the best offer for herself when the two were unmarried, and now her jealous cares were bestowed upon her boy, whom she sought to advance in his uncle's favor by any unscrupulous means.

It was her continued complaints that helped to set old Gregory against our hero.

The two boys were so different in their natures that they were continually at variance, and seldom a day passed without some direful account of Tom's delinquency being poured into the ears of the old gentleman.

John Gregory was a bachelor, rich, and the guardian of an old friend's child—Minnie Atherton—a fair young girl, heiress to immense wealth.

Mrs. Harpy cherished the hope of not only getting Gregory to leave the bulk of his money to her son, but also of marrying him to Minnie Atherton, when he was of age, that he might come into possession of the Atherton estates.

It was easy enough for Reuben to assist his mother in her mercenary schemes; he was a cunning, vulgar-minded boy, capable of any meanness, while Tom was too high-spirited and noble to stoop to the sneaking hypocrisy his cousin practiced in order to get into the good graces of his uncle.

After old Gregory had twisted about in his chair for a minute or two in the most agonizing contortions, he broke out afresh:

"Besides, isn't he always picking a quarrel

with his cousin Reuben? It's time they were separated. I'll send him to sea."

Mrs. Drake had no time to reply before the door was forced open with a snap, and the subject of their conversation, our hero, stood before his relatives.

He was a well-formed youth, slight in figure, but with well-knit limbs and expanded chest. His face was delicate in feature, though his complexion was somewhat bronzed with exposure to the sun.

His eyes were calm in their expression, but penetrating and fearless beyond his years. His rich brown hair was clustered carelessly about his broad, intelligent forehead.

Young as he was, there was something in his graceful form and careless defiance of bearing indicative of proud, undaunted resolve and energy.

His whole *physique* was that of a delicately-nurtured boy, sensitive in mind, high-spirited and generous, but unyielding and brave.

At a glance you could see that he was fitted for some high destiny, and that a word was enough to kindle the fiery nature that lay hidden beneath his frank, boyish looks and symmetrical form.

The mother's heart filled with proud joy as she gazed on her handsome son, and even old John Gregory felt more gentle towards the boy whom he had been urged by Reuben's mother to repel and mistrust.

"Well, you young scamp," he exclaimed, "is that the way to come blundering into your uncle's room—like an elephant breaking through a jungle—confound you? What do you mean?"

"I did not know you were here, uncle."

"Didn't know, you plague! Where did you think I was? And what's that you've got there?"

"A bird's nest, uncle; I got it from the tree on the peak. Minnie said she would like to have it, so I climbed up and got it, with the eggs."

"And risked breaking your neck, and putting me to the trouble of seeing after your funeral, besides breaking your mother's heart," bawled old Gregory. "Do you know, you plague, that the peak is three hundred feet above the precipice, and a slip would have dashed you to atoms—eh, sir?"

"I did not stop to think, sir; Minnie wanted it, and I got it."

"You did, you young rascal, as we see; but there, it's of no use talking to you. I've made up my mind what to do with you. I'll send you where you won't have a chance of half-killing poor Reuben again."

"Reuben's as big as me," Tom replied, boldly.

"He's not such a young tiger as you've turned out, you scamp! Pray, sir, what had he done to you that you should knock him over a fence, and send him in with a nose like—like—a boiled tomato?" old Gregory added, lost for a simile.

"Because he insulted me, and said what was not true."

"Indeed!"

"He said my mother depended on your bounty, and he told me he was to marry Minnie Atherton, and that I shouldn't have anything to say to her when she grows up."

"No more you shall—nor he either, you brace of young schemers. Do you think I would allow my old friend General Atherton's child to be thought of by such scapegraces as you? Do you think, sir, I'd have people say I gave his child

and her fortune to my own penniless relations. So that's your fine notion of the truth, is it? You first dare to say you have pretensions to Minnie, and then punch his head because he won't believe you; get out of my sight, sir—out, sir, this instant, or I'll kick you out!"

Considering the old fellow's disabled condition, this threat was, to say the least of it, rather strong; but Tom did not take advantage of him; he stood quietly waiting for what was to come next.

"You—you dog!" exclaimed Mr. Gregory, presently, "I'll have you sent off somewhere where you won't plague me any more, and where they'll warm your jacket for you if you attempt any more of your tricks. You shall go, sir, and never expect to see Miss Minnie again."

"Then I won't go," said Tom, abruptly.

"What?" cried the old gentleman, furious with passion. "You impertinent jackanapes! you scamp! you rascal—oh, my foot—you villain! all through you I've this attack. Oh—whew—ch!"

"You must be good and obey your uncle," Mrs. Drake remarked; "he has been kind to you and to me, and you must not be ungrateful."

"I don't want to be ungrateful," Tom replied, his clear eye moistening, "and I don't want to do wrong; but every one seems against me, and takes Reuben's part. And where does he want to send me to now?"

"To sea, you dog!" roared the old fellow, convulsed with agony; "to sea, where you'll be properly salted, and made a man of—whew! Come here, you scoundrel, will you? Lift my foot on to the sofa carefully; you let it fall, and I'll kill you!"

Tom, who in heart deeply sympathized with his uncle's afflictions, hastened to him, and tenderly raised his foot to the required elevation.

John Gregory grunted out a surly "thankee," and waving Tom and his mother from the room, rolled on his back, and groaned himself into a profuse perspiration.

CHAPTER II.

THE CLIFF IN THE BAY—REUBEN HARPY ATTEMPTS A WICKED DEED.

OUR hero went from his uncle's presence with his mind fired by the vision of the new life promised him.

The sea!

Often had he gazed from the windows of the comfortable old-fashioned home—gazed across the waters of the quiet bay it overlooked—watched the sails of distant vessels as they skimmed over the sea beyond, and thought how glorious a life it must be on board some gallant ship, sailing from end to end of the world, touching at distant climes, and now and then engaging in some desperate conflict with a pirate.

So full was his mind of this new idea that his eager questions troubled his loving mother, who could not bear the thought of parting with him.

She answered him quietly, trying to still his enthusiasm, and telling him of the hardships and perils of life at sea.

But the very means she took to check, or newly enkindle, his ardent expectations.

The recital of the terrors of a tempest, with the brave ship rolled like a mere atom on foaming waves—of the daring encounters

ates, caused the boy's heart to yearn for a share in such enterprises.

And when his mother left him she saw, with pain, that he was bent on his new and exciting career.

Tom left his mother, and scampered off to the woods to dream of future greatness as a naval commander, for, of course, he expected to rise, in a few weeks, to the highest grade.

Many a daring deed he planned and executed in his mind, and it was nearly evening before he thought of returning homewards.

He had nearly reached his uncle's home, when he was aroused from his pleasant dreams and castle-building by hearing his name called in an eager, childish voice.

The boy's heart leaped at the sound, and a hot rush of blood deepened the healthy glow on his cheeks.

He knew the voice belonged to his little sweetheart, Minnie Atherton.

She was standing on the brink of a running stream, preparing to cross the fording-stones, over which the clear water rippled.

As she stood there, with her golden hair fluttering in the breeze, and her light robes clinging to her fragile form, with her hand outstretched for him to help her across, and her pleasing blue eyes turned gladly towards him, she formed so pretty a picture that our youthful hero was, for the moment, only able to stand mutely gazing upon her.

And while he hesitated, spell-bound by her loveliness, a quick footstep sounded behind him, and his cousin, Reuben Harpy, hurried to Minnie to help her over the stream.

With the bound of a young deer, Tom sprang between him and Minnie, and the two boys stood confronting each other, each with a foot on the first stone of the ford.

They were nearly of the same age, but different in every respect of form and feature.

Reuben was considerably shorter in stature than Tom, and though his frame was broad, and evidently possessed of great muscular power, his body had a crouching attitude when contrasted with the upright bearing of Tom.

Nor was the difference in features less marked and characteristic of their natures.

The boy Reuben had a sullen, heavy cast of countenance; his eyes were deeply set, and peered maliciously from under their thick brows. His complexion was sallow, his lips were almost colorless.

Tom was the first to speak.

"Go back, Reuben," he said; "I will see Minnie home."

"I wouldn't leave you with her," he replied. "Uncle told me not; you know he can't trust you."

"Don't say that again," Tom exclaimed, his eyes flashing; "or I'll knock you into the pond!"

"Yes; you'd like to push me in there and drown me, if nobody saw you," replied the cowardly boy, "only you're afraid."

"Don't say I'm afraid," Tom cried, elbowing Reuben out of his path, "or I will."

"No, you'll not, you spiteful young vagabond!" a voice exclaimed, and Reuben, with malicious satisfaction, stepped back as the new-comer approached.

He was a short, thick-set man, in naval attire; he had an ugly cut of visage, coarse, repulsive, and exceedingly hairy.

He was well-known to both the boys, from the fact of his being a frequent visitor at Mr. Gregory's, to whom he was known as Lieutenant Andrew Sanderson, officer in the navy.

This man was the sole confidant and admirer of Reuben's mother.

As might have been expected, Sanderson hated Tom.

He feared the boy's penetration; besides, he stood in the way of a devilish design, by which he hoped to benefit himself.

A gleam of well-satisfied triumph shone in his steel-blue eyes as he came near Tom.

"A lucky thing for you," he said, "I'm here in time to prevent your murderous wickedness, you little villain! If I had my will, I'd thrash all that out of you!"

"You'd never thrash me," Tom answered, loftily; "try it if you dare."

Sanderson's face grew green with passion.

He dared not strike the fearless boy, much as he desired to stretch him at his feet.

"If I had you with me on board ship," he exclaimed, savagely, "I'd teach you what I dare do, mind that. I shall, perhaps, some day, and then I'll whip the tiger spirit out of you."

He turned to Reuben.

"Take Miss Minnie's hand, and we'll see her safe home. Away from there, young whelp!"

Reuben took a step forward; but swift as lightning, Tom was in front of him.

"Nobody takes Minnie home but me!" he cried;

"and don't you call me that name again, or I'll choke you."

The excited boy looked as if a word more would have made him leap at the man's brutish throat.

Perhaps Sanderson thought he might, for he did not attempt to interfere further with Tom, who taking Minnie's hand, helped her across the stream, and escorted her home.

Sanderson and Reuben followed close behind, nursing the evil passions which they did not feel inclined to vent on the excitable boy.

Sanderson did not fail to enlarge upon this episode before Mr. Gregory.

He represented Tom's conduct in such a murderous light that the old gentleman grew frightened, and determined on hurrying our hero's equipment for the sea.

Tom did not fret about this anxiety to get him out of the way.

His only regret was that Minnie would be left behind with Reuben; but then, he thought, he would soon come back an officer, and renowned for exploits, when he could claim her as his bride, and challenge Reuben to mortal combat if he dared to seek her hand.

Tom noticed sometimes, that when his prospects as a middy were spoken of, a cunning grin curled the lips of Sanderson, and a meaning glance passed between him and Reuben's mother; but he did not trouble himself about the cause.

He had reason enough afterwards to bitterly wish he had been warned by it.

Old John Gregory, since his last misconduct, had finally disgraced him, and would not allow him in his presence, but petted Reuben with every proof of affection, though often his heart reproached him when he happened to catch sight of the fearless boy going to or from the house, and he would growl out suddenly:

"The scamp will be a man some day—come home with the gold epaulette on his shoulder—I'll forgive him then—not before—not before."

But the old gentleman's forgiveness was destined to come earlier.

Seated at his open window one calm summer evening, he saw his graceful little ward, pretty Minnie Atherton, run down to the little lake near his house, and enter a beautiful, fairy-like boat he had built expressly for her.

It was an exquisitely-shaped vessel, chastely painted and gilt, and Minnie, who was quite an expert rower, looked very much like a fairy herself as she took the feather-shaped oars in her tiny hands and glided gently over the smooth water.

"Wrong of her to get in by herself with no one near," grunted the old gentleman, "wrong—very wrong."

With graceful movements the young child skillfully guided the boat up and down the lake. Suddenly he saw her bend with the oars, and impel the boat straight from the bank.

His surprise was great when he saw that she had done this to get away from Reuben, who had advanced to the brink of the lake.

The swiftness of the movement brought the fragile vessel in contact with a cluster of water-lilies, and, to the old gentleman's dismay and horror, the boat in a moment capsized, and the child sank.

John Gregory forgot gout, lumbago, neuralgia, and the other ills that afflicted him, as he sprung up, and leaning half out of the window, cried out lustily:

"In—in, boy! save her! rescue my child—my darling child! she is drowning! Help—help!"

His cries, and the suddenness of the echo, seemed to have startled away all the little nerve Reuben might have possessed, for, in place of leaping in to rescue Minnie, he turned away, and ran wildly towards the house, screaming, like a girl, for help.

"My God!" the old gentleman exclaimed, in palsied accents, "I shall lose her. The coward! Oh, that I could get there! Help—help, she will die! Ah, thank Heaven! he is there—he sees her; noble boy! he leaps in—has gone down—now he comes up—her face is above the water—he swims to the bank—oh, God be praised—God be praised!"

The old gentleman's voice sank to a tremulous whisper, and the tears coursed down his cheeks, as his head sank to the sill of the window.

Tom had seen the accident. He was far away—too far, he feared, to be in time—but, nimble as a young deer, he was soon at the edge of the lake—passing the craven-hearted Reuben on the way.

One swift plunge, and he had dived down to the bottom. A practiced swimmer, he knew how to rise with Minnie encircled with one arm.

She was senseless when he brought her to the bank, and the boy, with a strength he had never before experienced, held her to his breast, and ran with her to his uncle's house.

John Gregory met him on the threshold.

"My boy—my brave boy," he murmured; "lay her down here. Alas, poor child! now lift her head. She breathes. Kneel, boy—kneel—kneel, and thank God she is safe!"

Reverently did our hero go down upon his knees, and thank Heaven, when he saw Minnie open her fine blue eyes, and look fondly around.

A slight shiver ran through her gentle frame, and then she seemed herself again.

"Don't cry, pa, dear," she said to John Gregory, whose cheeks were saturated with tears; "I am safe now. I didn't see Tom, or I should not have been afraid. Wasn't he noble, pa, to save me, when Reuben ran away?"

"He is a brave, noble-hearted boy, whom I have wronged and treated harshly," exclaimed the old fellow, warmly clasping Tom's hands, and pressing them to his heart. "But he shall be recompensed for it—he shall. As for the coward—that Reuben—who left you to die, I shall never like him again."

Reuben sneaked in at that moment, blubbering like the chicken-hearted cur he was.

Old Gregory turned upon him fiercely.

"You let my Minnie drown," he said. "Why didn't you jump in to save her?"

"I couldn't swim," blubbered Reuben, ramming his knuckles into his watery eyes.

"Couldn't swim, you brute! You're not good for anything except cowardice and deceit. Don't stand sniveling there, you big baby—go and try to learn to swim, and be a man."

"Don't scold him, pa," Minnie said. "I didn't want him to save me."

She looked fondly at our hero.

Tom returned the glance with one of equal affection.

For the last few moments his brain had been in a whirl.

He had heard ringing in his brain those electric words of hers:

"I didn't see Tom, or I shouldn't have been afraid."

Minnie got over her immersion sooner than might have been expected; in a little while she laughed merrily at the adventure.

Reuben's designing mother and her associate, Sanderson, could have wrung Tom's neck when they heard of the heroic act by which he had restored himself to his uncle's favor.

John Gregory had been brave as boy and man, and from the bottom of his honest old heart he despised a coward.

In proportion as he idolized our hero for his gallant courage, so did he dislike the craven-hearted Reuben.

The tables were turned. Reuben was in lasting disgrace, while Tom stood on the summit of his uncle's esteem.

Instead of being ashamed of his own cowardice Reuben allowed his malignant mind to brood over his downfall until his feelings were full of bitterness against his high-spirited cousin, and in his heart he cherished a savage animosity which Tom's noble nature could never have dreamed of.

One evening, about a week after this occurrence, Tom had gone up to his usual resting-place at sunset, the brow of a cliff above the bay, where he could lie at full length, indulging in blissful visions of the future, and watching the vessels in the bay or out at sea.

Already, in his fancy, he had advanced through rapid stages of promotion, and had returned to claim Minnie for his wife, an officer's epaulette on his shoulder, and sword girded by his side, when he thought he heard a stealthy step creeping behind him.

At the moment he was seated on the very brink of the cliff, the view down to the clear blue waters fascinating him with its subtle sense of danger.

He knew that few people could sit there and not become dizzy, and it was more out of daring hardihood than anything else that he had taken up so perilous a position.

The sun was just setting in all its grand and glorious beauty across the sea.

The air was soft and cool.

For hours he could have gazed on the enchanted scene.

The footsteps disturbed the current of his thoughts, but he had not time to turn or rise before a shadow was thrown beside him—a shadow which he instinctively felt belonged to his cousin Reuben, and he could almost feel his ill-odored breath as he heard a hoarse whispered cry of hate given at the same time that he received a push that thrust him over the top of the cliff.

His breath went from him in the giddy descent.

Not a gasp, not a cry escaped his lips.

He had made a vain, wild clutch at the rock as he slipped down headlong.

There was a stunning and suffocating crash—and after that, darkness.

And then the sullen, murderous visage of Reuben

ben Harpy, which had peered over the edge as far as he dare venture, was withdrawn, as the craven boy, trembling in every limb, shivering with fear at his own dastardly act, reeking with clammy sweat, but savagely exulting even in his quaking heart, made his way down the glassy slope.

CHAPTER III.

TWO JOLLY SALTS—TOM FINDS HIMSELF IN THE HANDS OF THE PRESS-GANG.

THE cliff, from the brink of which Tom had made his abrupt descent—a descent that would have taken him to another world, and made this history unnecessary, had he not been providentially watched over, even as the sparrows are—overhung the bay, its crest projecting considerably over its base, which was hollowed out in immense fissures, through which the waters sometimes penetrated, but which in calm weather were left secure and dry.

One or two of these hollows led underground, and were taken advantage of by certain enterprising gentlemen who were addicted to habits of a smuggling nature.

There was one passage, indeed, that had been delved into till its outlet ran directly under an old inn of not very good repute, situate some distance inland, and much frequented by weather-beaten mariners whose characters were not of the best, and regarding whose health sundry gentlemen, known as custom-house officers, were particularly and intrusively anxious.

It happened that on the eventful evening of Tom's unprepared-for header, that two gentlemen of the smuggling fraternity were snugly ensconced in this particular fissure, and were indulging, like two tired boon-companions, in long draughts of smuggled brandy, when the apparition of Tom, tumbling down with the speed of Vulcan's anvil, when its owner was kicked out of Heaven, startled their vision, and caused the worthy who was then pulling at the flask to pause, after a hearty swig, and say to his messmate:

"Jerry, did anything tumble before your top-light?"

To which Jerry empathically replied:

"No; nothing didn't."

"Dash my timbers if I didn't see a summat a tumbling all adrift overboard; and as sure as my name's Bob Hauler, some blessed lubber's took a header off the cliff. I'll peep out and see."

"And be nabbed by some of them darned revenue sharks? Take the advice of a true tar, Bob, and stay where you are. 'Taint no business of ours if any lubberly lout wants to go to Davy Jones' locker, or take dinner with old Neptune; so have another swig, and stick here as I do—like a limpet to a crag, or a barnacle to a ship's bottom."

The advice of the redoubtable Jerry was thrown away on Bob Hauler—a weather-beaten, brawny youngster, of devil-may-care rollicking aspect—who had already crept to the extremity of the fissure, and now startled his mate by singing out:

"Avast there, mate! Here's a fellow creature drowning in the water!"

Jerry Mizzen, such was his name, staggered to his feet.

"Where away, messmate?" he cried.

But Bob Hauler had already flung off his jacket, and leaped into the bay.

He reappeared in a few minutes, holding the inanimate face of Tom above the water.

A few strokes of his brawny arms brought them both to a landing-place; and Jerry Mizzen relieving Bob Hunter of his boyish burden, carried Tom in, and by the time his gallant preserver had clambered inside, was pouring copious draughts of brandy down our hero's throat, grumbling all the while, in true sailor style:

"What the devil did he perch up there for, like a mouse on a peacock's tail? He might have took his davy that he'd go, like a plummer, stern over bows into the bay. Well, the dousing, perhaps, will do him good. And that's bringing him to a bit, the lubber."

Bob Hauler was silent.

He had lifted our hero's head to his knee, and was as anxiously waiting for signs of returning consciousness as if Tom was his own son.

"Jerry," he said, presently.

"I'm all ears," Jerry replied, attempting a laugh.

"Well, they are long," Bob remarked, looking at the articles in question, which were as much like a pair of flappers as anything. "Jerry, I'd like to know who pushed him over."

"Pushed! why, in course he tumbled off his perch himself."

"I'll go short of grog for a week if he did; I know the lad; he's nephew of old Gregory, up

yonder; a fine, brave lad, too, with spirit enough in him for anything. I've seen him perched aloft, there, for hours; his brain wouldn't get dizzy with looking down here, mark my words! Some-one thrust him over, and I should very much like to find out the gentleman that did it."

Tom had by this time opened his eyes.

He was still giddy with his fall, but felt reassured when his gaze met the careless countenance of Rob Hauler.

"Well, my young skylark," Bob cried, how d'ye feel? any the worse for your dousing, eh?"

"Cheer up, my hearty," put in Jerry Mizzen, "and tell us how you felt when you came through the air like a corkscrew. Rouse up, lad; we'll take care of you. Drink, my lad, and tell us how you came to tumble off."

"I didn't tumble," Tom replied. "I was pushed into the bay by Ruben Harpy."

"Hang me if I didn't think so!" Bob Hauler cried. "But never mind, Master Tom, you're born for better things than to be drowned by such a lubberly skunk as Reuben Harpy, any way."

"Yes," chimed in Jerry Mizzen; "them that is born to be hanged will never be drowned."

This speech on the part of Jerry was rewarded by a spanker between his eyes with a dead fish, which happened to be the most handy thing Bob Hauler could find.

A good-tempered scuffle ensued between the pair, who belabored each other with such perfect good will, that, incensed as Tom was at Reuben's craven treachery, he could not forbear laughing heartily.

Bob Hauler gave a sailor's genuine cheer when he heard Tom laugh.

"That's a good sign," he said; "shows the right stuff. I'll wager a cask or two of brandy that your sneaking, snivelling cousin wouldn't laugh like that after he elaps his eyes on you."

"Why don't you make a row?" Jerry exclaimed, sulkily. "Ain't we got all of our work to do to elude them officers, and there you are, braying like a jackass."

"Hush!" Tom said; "I hear the sound of oars."

The trio lay still, but could presently discern a boat approaching.

Two custom officers were seated in its stern.

Jerry Mizzen's face wore the most ludicrous expression as the boat went by.

They had fourteen casks of smuggled brandy in the hole in the cliff, and under the very nose of the revenue officers.

He could have stood on his head when the boat pulled out of sight.

Then Bob Hauler respectfully took Tom's hand.

"Master Tom," he said, "You've shown the mettle of a man; you might have betrayed us, had you chosen. Don't think Bob Hauler ever forgets; should the day come when he can be of service to you, only ask, and all he can do shall be done."

"Clap a stopper on your jawing tackle, Jerry exclaimed, "and let this young gentleman go home; the smell of the brandy might get too strong for him if he stays here any longer."

Tom, who understood readily that they had some smuggling venture in progress, smiled good-naturedly, and thanking both for picking him out of the water, took his departure, much to the satisfaction of Jerry Mizzen, who never cared about having too many eyes on him during his delicate operations of tricking the revenue officers.

Our hero encountered his treacherous relative almost on the threshold of their uncle's dwelling.

Had the cowardly boy suddenly met a specter he could not have been more utterly awe-stricken.

His features were livid, his jaws hung, his eyes grew fixed in terror, his knees shook beneath him.

Tom did not deign him a word, but looked at him till the terrified wretch dropped cowering to the ground in a fit.

Then our hero passed on and left him.

Reuben gathered some courage after our hero had gone.

He managed to crawl away and tell his infamous mother and her paramour what had transpired.

They were in close consultation, when Reuben, with his white face, and knees knocking together came to tell his tale.

At first Mrs. Harpy was in high consternation; but the more calculating Sanderson quieted her fears.

"I wish your boy had more courage," he observed, after he had sent Reuben away; "he is scared by a look."

"That cursed boy!" Sanderson continued; "had the fool shown the least pluck, all would have been well. I know old Gregory's temper; he'll never forget his cowardice."

"What are we to do?" Mrs. Harpy rejoined, with ashy face. "Would it be better to put him out of the way?"

"Not yet, if you mean the old fool; he is useful—no, I have a plan; he has got this brat—his favorite Tom—a middy's berth in the navy. He won't do as much for Reuben, for fear he should prove a coward, and disgrace the profession. I propose, then, that we let him have his own way; but instead of this Tom flaunting it as a midshipman, I'll have him taken by the press-gang, and shipped as a sailor-boy. If hard work don't kill him, his gunpowder nature will soon get him into a scrape that will finish him."

"I hope it may soon do so," Mrs. Harpy exclaimed; "he has been a thorn in my side since he was born. I have felt that he would ever stand in my boy's way."

"He might not have done so had Reuben been different, but there is no help for it now. To make our plans complete, Reuben must enter himself in the name of Tom Drake."

"Is this necessary? Could not something speedier be done?"

"No. Do you think I would wait a day otherwise? John Gregory must not die yet: his consent alone disposes of Minnie Atherton and her property, and that cannot be touched till she is of age. I know enough of Reuben to be aware that in a short time he will bring disgrace enough on the name of Tom Drake to make Gregory repent, especially when he is dismissed the service and degraded—mind, as Tom Drake. We'll gull the old fool till he is sick of the name of his hopeful—get Reuben again in his favor—obtain his consent to his union with the girl—his ward—make certain that his will is signed in Reuben's favor—and then into the madhouse or the grave with John Gregory."

Mrs. Harpy's eyes glittered as her base accomplice unfolded his vile plans.

"Is this plan sure of success?" she asked.

"Certain."

"When will you put it into execution?"

"At once—all my arrangements shall be made to-night—to-morrow this boy, whom we have such reason to dread, shall be removed from our path. The press-gang will have him safe, and if he should get put on my vessel, God help him! I've a long account to settle with him when once he is in my power."

Our youthful hero, little suspecting the vile plot maturing against him, was singularly happy the whole day.

His commission as a middy had arrived, and all arrangements were complete for him to enter on his new career.

The only sadness that clouded his joy was the thought of having to bid his mother and Minnie farewell.

His little sweetheart took matters more bravely than he had expected.

She felt proud of him in his new position, and her encouragements and girlish vows got over half the pangs of his separation from her.

Old John Gregory allowed them to ramble forth together that evening, as it was the last day of Tom's stay.

They wandered to the old place by the lake, where they had often plighted their childish vows, and which had been the scene of his prompt rescue of her.

"Don't you think, dear Minnie," Tom said, his earnest voice husky with emotion, "they will ever persuade you to be untrue to me?"

"They never shall," Minnie replied, gaily; "they may try, but I know you will come back in time to save me, as you did from the lake. You'll be a brave, handsome officer then, and so proud with your sword and your epaulettes, and your cocked hat."

Tom kissed the fair cheek of the coquettish little speaker, and in true lover fashion gallantly fastened around her neck a small gold chain, suspended to which was a gold ring.

"That shall be your love-token," said he. "No one shall take it from you till I ask you to give it back to me, and this shall be mine."

He kissed his own love-token.

It was a small miniature attached to a tress of Minnie's golden hair.

A proud look passed over the boy's handsome face as he replaced it in his breast.

"No one shall take that from me while I have life," he said, drawing Minnie closer to him, and looking lovingly in her fair young face.

"You are not afraid that I shall never come again?" he said presently.

"I dreamed you came back again," Minnie said. "I'm sure you're born to be a great man, because when I saw you it was on the deck of such a beautiful ship, and you had stars and orders on your breast, and were dressed like a great admiral, and you looked so handsome." Minnie blushed as she said this; "a large black flag was over your head, but I thought it only

meant that you were the king of every ship, and that none was so great as you."

Tom's fine eyes kindled as he listened; it was a picture congenial to his own mind, to stand supreme on the broad deck of some noble ship, with a willing crew ready to obey his slightest will.

He kissed Minnie for her prophecy, and when he bade her farewell, all that she had conjured up rose as vividly before his mind as if it had actually occurred.

Even to the black flag—but he had forgotten that the black banner was the insignia of piracy and death.

Our hero wandered through the seafaring town by the bay, to take his farewell of scenes he was so soon to quit, for years, perhaps.

In front of a little tavern, of anything but inviting appearance, his attention was drawn to three or four ill-looking fellows, half crimp, half sailor in appearance, who were loitering in front of the tavern, and regarding him with sinister gaze as he went by.

He had got some distance on his way home when he again found himself confronted by those same men.

He might not have heeded them then, but he was in a dark, deserted lane, with no human habitation near, and the men were, to say the least, suspicious in their regard to him.

But they passed him without molestation, and he was reproaching himself for his momentary apprehension, when he felt himself suddenly seized from behind.

Before he could utter a sound, a gag was forced before his mouth, and a coarse laugh behind him told him the meaning of his capture.

Kidnapped.

With the fury of a young panther he bounded from the grasp of those that held him, and with flashing eye demanded how they dare attack a midshipman.

The only reply was a mocking laugh, that he thought sounded familiar; then a swift blow was dealt him on the back of his head, and he fell to the earth unconscious.

CHAPTER IV.

AT SEA.

OLD Gregory's estate was situated on that point of Nova Scotia which overlooks the portion of the Gulf of St. Lawrence that runs between the mainland and Prince Edwards Island.

At the time of which we write, the English were hard pushed for sailors, and the "press gang" was put into force, not only on those shores, but means were found of recruiting from the Canadian shores; which was not right, we admit.

But when men or boys found themselves out at sea, and under the despotic British flag, they knew resistance or protestations were useless.

When our hero came to his senses, he was lying on a hard pallet in a close, suffocating pen, so dark that he could distinguish nothing but a mass of shapeless objects around him.

Shapeless but not silent.

Now and then a deep groan startled him, and then a bitter oath or curse, whose blasphemy seemed to freeze his blood.

And now began the painful task of recalling the incidents that led to his presence there, wherever it was, that he was held prisoner.

That he was still a captive he was disagreeably made aware of by the fact that his wrists were bound together by rope.

The truth of his position soon dawned upon him.

His remembrance of the attack under which he had succumbed, and the oaths and converse of those who, like himself, were confined in that stifling hole, left no doubt upon his mind.

The oscillation beneath his feet was now no mystery to him.

He was penned up in the hold of a vessel moving out to sea.

Bitter were his feelings as he realized his fate.

Snatched away from his mother—from Minnie—without a word of adieu; his absence unexplained, and that at the moment when his prospects were so promising.

Brave as the boy was, he could not repress a cry of anguish and anger.

"Why—why am I trapped like this?" he cried, clenching his bandaged hands. "Why am I brought here?"

"To serve the king, my little man," a voice said, close to him; "that's why we're all brought here; not because it's our wish, but because we couldn't help ourselves; and a man don't have much chance when he's felled like a bullock."

A coarse laugh from the more careless prisoners, oaths and imprecations from others, followed this speech.

"But I already had a midshipman's berth," Tom cried.

"You'd better tell that to the marines," the same voice observed; "slack yarns don't run down here."

"What ship did you say?" another voice asked.

"The *Thunderer*—Captain Hyde."

"Oh, well, thunder or lightning, it's all one; you'll have enough of both if you're not knocked over at first."

Tom hazarded no further remark; he felt that no one there could help him. His only chance was when the captain inspected them the next morning, as he heard one of the prisoners say he was sure to do.

Besides, keenly as he felt his own misfortune, he was not the only sufferer.

Many of those present, as he could hear from what they said, had been torn from home and wives, or sweethearts.

One young fellow was to have been married the next Sunday; another had only been married a week.

The latter suspected a discarded lover of being concerned in getting him pressed, and with many a deep curse he swore to have his heart's blood should he live to return.

The weary hours of the night passed slowly away.

At early bells, and when the light was struggling into the hold, the captain and two of his officers, accompanied by two seamen, came to look at them.

He was a tall, hard-featured man, with iron resolve in every muscle of his stern face.

He listened coldly to their several complaints, and passed each by till he came to Tom.

"This boy is young," he observed, regarding our hero attentively.

This was the chance Tom wanted.

As briefly as possible he related the facts of his capture.

The captain listened unmoved.

It was impossible to gather from his features what impression the recital had made.

Have you your midshipman's warrant with you?" he asked, when Tom had finished.

"It was in my breast-pocket, sir; but it is gone now."

"Humph! Mr. John Gregory, did you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we will see to the truth of your story. We have an officer on board who came from the bay. He shall see you."

Tom's heart leaped gladly within him.

His story would be corroborated, and that would release him from the hardships which otherwise were in store for him.

He never felt so impatient as when the officer was being sent for; but he came at length.

"There is a lad here who says he has been kidnapped," the captain said, "and bears a middy's rank, a nephew of Mr. Gregory's. Do you know him, Sanderson?"

Sanderson!

Tom's heart felt like lead.

He needed only to look up and see the brutal face of his old enemy, with the malignant eyes glaring in triumph over him, to know that all his hopes were dashed to the earth.

But he was not prepared for the consummate lie Sanderson now asserted.

"Yes, sir; that is Mr. Gregory's graceless nephew; a bad boy; the one he has had continual trouble with, I regret to say. His name is Reuben Harpy."

As Tom sprang angrily to his feet, and looked the dastard in the face, the captain turned his cold glance upon him.

"Reuben Harpy; he told me his name was Drake."

"Falsehood is his besetting sin, sir. Tom Drake is a worthy lad, and was shipped as a middy on board the *Thunderer*."

"Liar!" Tom cried, hotly. "How dare you utter so atrocious a falsehood?"

"Enough," interrupted the captain; "the trick is palpable; by taking his cousin's name he hoped to get off. I have no wish to begin harshly with you," he continued, addressing Tom; "my name is Captain Parker, this ship is the *Arethusa* frigate. I am a strict officer, but you seem a likely lad, and I should like to see you get on—try and make a change for the better—but remember, if we have advancements and favors for those who do their duty, we have punishments, and severe ones, for the idle and disobedient."

With these words Captain Parker turned on his heel, and the door was shut upon Tom and his companions in misfortune.

So excited was the high-spirited boy by this undeserved treatment, that he would have battered the panels in with his clenched hands, if he had not been pacified by the rest.

With cheeks crimson, and eyes flashing indig-

nantly, the proud boy sat down, resolved to bear the worst rather than give his enemy a new chance over him.

"They shall see that I can bear hardships, at least," he exclaimed, half aloud.

"That's right, my cheery lad," a familiar voice exclaimed, and looking around he saw the careless features of Bob Hauler, and the woe-begone visage of Jerry Mizzen.

Another hope sprang up in Tom's breast.

"You are my friends," he said; "you can testify that I have spoken the truth."

"No use, Master Tom," Bob Hauler replied. "I'd have spoken before, only I knew it would not do any good—there's a dead set again you, and you must tide it over. I should not be believed, and might be a marked man, if I swore till I was blue—so, my cheery lad, pluck up your true mettle, and do not give that yellow alligator we've got over us—your friend Sanderson—a scrape of a chance; he is waiting for it, and won't let it go by if you give it him—so show him your true stuff, and don't forget, if our mouths are tied as yet, that you've some friends on board this hulking boat, which, for aught I care, may sink to the bottom to-morrow."

Tom stretched out his hands.

It was something to be sure of a friend.

The manly grasp of the tar was balm to his wounded spirit—and he resolved at all hazards to do his duty.

When eight bells were struck the boatswain came and set them free, ordering them at the same time to follow him on deck, that he might set them about the work of the ship.

Tom cast one wistful glance across the ocean.

The cliffs behind the bay were almost out of sight, and the freshening wind promised soon to take them far out to sea.

Indeed, more canvas would have been flying, but that they were partially lying to, to allow a tender to overhaul them.

This she did about two o'clock, and then another batch of prisoners were helped on board the man-of-war.

The last one who was helped on deck was a powerful, muscular man, with a fine classical head and massive black beard.

He had been severely wounded, and was even now suffering from the effects of some stupefying drug, which, powerful as it was, had failed to prostrate his herculean frame.

He glanced around him like a captive panther when he stood on the frigate's deck, and fearlessly facing the captain, said, hoarsely:

"They've trapped me, Captain Parker, but I have marked my man, and as God is above us, so will I squeeze the life out of his throat the first time he comes within reach of my hands. I'll do a man's work while I am caged here, but let me have one chance of liberty, and I'll show you what use I can make of it."

His strong voice shook with passion.

Captain Parker betrayed no sign of having heard him, and he stepped back among the rest.

He was a singular man this.

He was called Ben Barnacle.

He went about his work with the skill of a practiced seaman.

He was tireless, too; fatigue never seemed to touch his stalwart frame.

When the men sang at their work his was the one grave, stolid face among them, conspicuous by its sullen look of deadly resolve.

He ate, too, and drank with his messmates, but in silence, never once exchanging a word with officer or man.

Thrice under most hazardous circumstances he made desperate attempts to escape.

Once he cast himself adrift on a plank.

Once he was taken up while clinging to the rudder.

On a third occasion he actually lowered a boat, and was almost in it when he was discovered.

Each time he bore with sullen silence his punishment, and returned to his duty as before.

Our hero felt a strange interest in this singular man, who, on his part, seemed less unfavorably disposed towards the young sailor.

Galling as Tom found his life on board the frigate, he was careful to give his enemy, Sanderson, no pretext for accusing him before the captain.

He was ever attentive and willing, and Sanderson, who watched eagerly for the least chance against him, ground his teeth in savage chagrin when he saw the gallant boy not only toiled him, but was gradually gaining favor with the captain.

With all his faults of discipline, and there were times when he made the frigate a floating hell—Captain Parker had a keen appreciation of the true qualities of a sailor, and these he instinctively recognized in Tom the first time he saw him go about his work.

"I am glad to see that lad striving to gain a

better character," he observed once to Sanderson. "I have good hopes of him if he goes on as he has begun."

And Sanderson, who hated Tom more intensely every hour, was compelled to pretend acquiescence in the captain's words.

Off a reefy coast in the Mediterranean a violent storm suddenly came upon them, and though sails were taken in immediately, the fury of the tempest was so tremendous that the ship swung around leeward of the dangerous coast, and had not righted when an immense sea struck her between decks and washed the helmsman off his feet.

Captain Parker saw the imminent peril of his ship.

A moment and she seemed about to plunge headlong among the boiling breakers.

The catastrophe was so sudden that he had not time to give the sharp order before Tom had taken the helmsman's place, and with his slim figure defying the fierce gale, guided the vessel from its dangerous course.

At the rate at which the ship was heeling to, with the seas sweeping her at every minute, Tom's intrepidity and daring were the more conspicuous.

The iron-hearted captain gave him an approving glance, and the men set up a cheer that almost drowned the deafening roars of the breakers.

As calm as if he was on the smoothest river, Tom steered the *Arethusa*, managing the wheel so cleverly that Bob Hauler could not restrain his enthusiasm, but cried lustily:

"There he is, like a little captain, steering us as if the sea were a smooth lake instead of a boiling cauldron. Hurrah for our little captain! Three cheers for Captain Tom!"

The ringing cheer was taken up by every throat, and Lieutenant Sanderson, cowering in malice, secretly cursed the noble boy for his daring, even though it saved the ship.

And Tom never swerved from the helm till the ship was safely through the sea of rocks and foam, and then he gave up his post and allowed himself to be carried off in triumph to the shout of "Three cheers for Captain Tom."

And that was how he gained a name destined afterwards to be renowned far and wide as the name of the daring, princely boy whom no power could capture or subdue, and whose flag bore the one motto: "Invincible."

All the next day Sanderson went about with the most demoniac passion seething in his breast.

He would have given much for a chance to vent his spleen upon our hero, but it was baffled in every attempt.

Tom treated him with a contemptuous semblance of respect that galled him to the quick.

He strove all in his power to insult the high-spirited boy.

It was marvelous how even Ben Barnacle endured the persecution of the low-minded tyrant.

The ship's crew had a severe time of it for the next few days; when it was Sanderson's watch they knew the treat in store for them.

"Anchors and jackstays are always dirty," he would cry. "Away you go, you lazy lubbers, with your hammers, and knock the rust off!"

And the "lazy lubbers," looking fierce and sullen, but not daring to utter a word of complaint, would obey.

Sanderson had the captain's orders to trim them into able seamen, to get them "salted," as he termed it.

And he salted them; salted them in a way which was not at all to their taste.

Salt beef for breakfast, dinner and supper; salt crackers, soaked in salt water! a bottle of salts for the rheumatism; the same medicine for a broken leg.

"Ay! even for a broken neck!" howled one morning a poor devil who had fallen from the main-top.

The fifth day after Tom's exploit at the helm, a terrific squall pounced upon the frigate, taking her unawares, and knocking her over on her beam ends.

Royals and top-gallant sails had been taken in, but the topsails, not having yet been stowed, were torn to tatters, and the rags sent to Neptune for a present.

The water poured over the lee bulwarks in torrents; the cook's galley was blown to pieces; three or four gigs running at large slipped squealing to leeward, and finally rolled over the partially submerged bulwarks into the sea.

It was Sanderson's watch, and he stood howling out his orders in a voice like that of a caged tiger, while the "lazy lubbers" hopped to and fro like so many madmen, tugging first at one rope and then another.

Suddenly a little Sandwich Island boy named

Kanak, with an enormous head, appeared at the companion-way.

"Dinner is ready!" he shouted with all the strength of his lungs.

Sanderson hated this boy—hated him because Tom had taken notice of him, because he displayed a faithful affection toward our young hero in return.

In a moment he sprang upon him with a bound, and, seizing him by his shirt-collar, dragged him on deck.

"You miserable shark—you infernal little imp—you cannibal's whelp—do you dare speak of dinner at such a time as this?"

The "little imp," who was but thirteen years of age, clasped his hands, and howled for mercy.

"Ay—ay! I'll mercy you!" roared the tyrant; and pointing to the spanker-boom, which had been slushed on the day before, he ordered him to get a sharp knife and scrape it.

"Oh, no—no!" cried the poor lad, in piteous tones; "de ship roll, de wind blow, and s'pose me go up dere, me quick fall into de sea."

"So much the better!" cried Sanderson; "there will be one lubber less in the world. Now, then, away you go!" he cried, dealing the boy a kick which almost knocked him into the sea. "Away you go, and scrape that boom!"

Repressing his excitable feelings as well as he could, Tom came aft, and respectfully offered to do the task so brutally imposed upon the helpless lad.

His old enemy glared on him as if he thought he had at last got a chance of putting him in a snare.

"Who the furies called you to interfere, you mutinous young vagabond?" he cried, hoarse with fury. "Clamber up the fore topsails, and stop half-way if you dare!"

Tom stayed a moment to speak encouragingly to little Kanak.

"Cling fast with your ankles and knees when you go up there," he said, "and don't look down—if you fall a murder will be committed."

"D—n you, go up both of you, cursed hounds!" Sanderson roared.

Tom gave a slight spring, and was quickly up the shroud.

Little Kanak was not so fortunate.

He stood shivering with fear, and the tyrant, dealing him another violent blow, sent him reeling against the mizzen-mast.

An indignant glance shot from Tom's eyes, but he continued his ascent—while a second menace from Sanderson sent the trembling boy up to his task.

Bruised and limping, he drew himself into the mizzen shrouds, and soon gained the boom.

Here he paused for a moment, and looked pitifully down into the red upturned face of the tyrant, hoping that he would relent and call him back.

Sanderson cursed him, and bade him go on.

"Me know me fall," cried Kanak, still hesitating. "De boom so slippery, me no can stay dere long. Me fall, and p'raps break leg or neck; p'raps go into de sea."

With an oath Sanderson sprang through the companion-way, and soon reappeared with a pistol, which he aimed at Kanak's head.

"Go on—go on at once," he shrieked, "or you are a dead lad."

"Well, den," moaned the youngster, "me will go, but know me can neber hold on dere. And if me killed, me like you tell captain to take Kanak's Bible out of my trunk, missionary gib me, and let dis boy's mudder hab it when ship get to de Sandwich Island."

The lieutenant did not reply, but the click was heard as he cocked his piece, and with a groan the lad threw himself upon the boom.

Trembling in every limb, he began to crawl along the projecting spar.

His hands slipped several times, and it seemed as if he would fall; but, with a desperate effort, he contrived to regain his balance, and finally to reach the end of the boom.

"Now, then, scrape away!" roared the tyrant, springing upon the round-house, "and see that you do your work well."

He was now directly beneath the lad, looking up at him with a gleam of malicious pleasure shining in his hard blue eyes.

Kanak was clinging desperately to the slippery boom with his hands and knees.

It was evident that the moment he should let go of it to grasp the knife that was between his teeth he would fall either upon the deck or into the sea.

The quivering of the spar almost caused him to lose his hold as it was, for there was no rope near enough to be grasped.

With staring eyeballs and chattering teeth, he glared upon the foaming, hissing waves of the sea, upon the hard, pitiless face of the lieutenant,

upon the pistol still aimed at his head, and uttered a low groan.

"Come—come! lively with that knife. Go to work, you infernal imp of Satan—go to work, or whizz flies a bullet through your brain!"

Again the ominous click of the piece was heard, and Kanak, clutching the spar with his left hand, until his nails almost pierced the surface of it, let go of it with his right, and succeeded in grasping his knife.

At the same moment the ship made a furious plunge, and the boy uttered a loud shriek, as his knees slipped from under him.

He was thus brought astride of the boom; but, as the bows lifted, he was hurled sideways from his position.

His wild cry pierced the ears of his shipmates, and made the blood leap back to their hearts.

They saw him fall, saw his body strike the lieutenant in the descent, and heard the report of the pistol.

Then rushing aft, they witnessed a spectacle fearful to behold.

The lieutenant lay upon the round-house, with Kanak's knife buried to the hilt in his chest.

The boy was not badly hurt.

His fall had been broken by coming in contact with Sanderson.

He was somewhat bruised, however, and needed the assistance of one of the men to regain his feet.

"Me no do dis on purpose," he moaned, pointing to the wounded officer. "When me fall me strike him, and de point of de knife go into his chest. Dey no hang me? You no tink dey hang me?" he continued, looking around with terrified countenance.

Sanderson glared around him savagely.

"The other one as well," he said, fiercely.

"He prompted him to do it. You heard him say if he fell there would be murder! Let both suffer—both die!"

Tom had reached the deck by this time.

Captain Parker gazed sternly in his face.

Sanderson's accusations had taken ground, and before Tom could repel the charge, he and little Kanak were manacled together and thrust into the frigate's darkest place of confinement.

CHAPTER V.

THE COURT-MARTIAL.

For five days our hero and poor little Kanak were kept in close confinement.

They took their food together, and slept with the iron manacles on the wrists of each.

Little Kanak at first gave way to excessive grief, but Tom's coolness and fortitude eventually quieted him.

On the sixth day they were brought before a naval court-martial, at which Sanderson, who had sufficiently recovered to give evidence, attended.

He was still pale and weak, and his bold features showed the amount of suffering he had endured.

He gave the two boys a look of murderous hate when they were brought in, and made his evidence as telling as he could against them.

If he had been well liked by the officers, or death had resulted from his injury, it might have gone hard with Tom and the island boy; as it was, they did not hold the charge well proved, and the boys were set at liberty.

A cheer rang through the ship when the decision was made known.

The sailors were glad to see their tyrant discomfited.

Events of a stormy nature now occupied the minds of all.

The *Arethusa* had received orders to make for Algeria, and take part in the attempts to destroy the fleet of terrible pirates whose merciless ravages made the civilized world shudder to hear.

The pirates had a numerous fleet of vessels, which they adroitly managed, and though some hard knocks were exchanged with the *Arethusa*, they eluded all Captain Parker's attempts to sink any one of them.

At the first opening of the cannonade Tom felt in his proper element.

Amidst the smoke and din he stood upon a gun under a heavy fire, deliberately directing it to be pointed so as to disable an enemy.

And when the word ran around to prepare for boarders, the boy's bold heart dilated with joyous enthusiasm, and he longed for the exciting moment of hand-to-hand encounter.

As yet, however, the pirates had sense enough to keep out of boarding distance.

Captain Parker, who was as brave a commander as ever trod a deck, galled at his non-success, determined upon the bold attempt of attacking the pirates under the guns of their forts; and early

One morning, in conjunction with several other ships, he opened fire, which was hotly returned.

In the midst of the fray, an armed corvette, which had only recently come up with the English squadron, was observed to run under the fire of a masked battery, which instantly swept her decks.

She lay in such a position that none of the pirate vessels could come out to take her, on account of the fire of the English squadron, and every eye was anxiously turned towards her to see whether she would run in close to the guns and silence them.

So excited was Tom at the spectacle that, forgetful of his duty, he leaped into the shrouds to see what was going forward on her decks.

A group of officers were standing on her decks, and he saw a sudden discharge pour in amongst them, and instantly stretch them all bleeding or dead upon the deck.

A moment after, a young midshipman crept to the mizzenmast, and the flag was lowered as a token of surrender.

A derisive groan attended this act.

The vessel's escape would have been so easy had she been properly managed.

Shouts from the pirates proclaimed their pleasure at this first installment of victory.

Then the corvette's boats were lowered on the side protected from the fort's cannon, and the whole of her crew tumbled hastily in.

They were coldly received on board the *Arethusa*, the nearest ship.

Captain Parker, with a dignified wave of the hand, ordered them below.

He would not allow them to share in the fighting on board his vessel.

Evening came on before anything decisive occurred on either side, and the British ships ceased firing and got out of range for the night.

Then Captain Parker sent his first lieutenant to summon the officers of the surrendered ship.

His lieutenant returned with the intelligence that all the superior officers had been killed by a fatal discharge from the fort, and that the next in command was Midshipman Drake, who had ordered the flag to be struck and had then deserted the ship.

Our hero leaped as if he had received a bullet when he heard this statement.

A moment after his cowardly cousin stood on the same deck with him.

Captain Parker exchanged only a few words with Reuben Harpy.

He dismissed him in frigid silence [and full of shame and mortification.

The craven-hearted dastard was turning away when his gaze met the piercing glance of his wronged relative.

He started back as if a serpent had stung him.

That look sufficed to excite the impetuous boy beyond control.

Regardless of the presence of his captain, forgetting that, spurious as was Reuben's claim, he was in the light of a superior officer, he seized him abruptly by the throat, and cried:

"Coward! we meet at a fitting time. Lay down the rank you deprive me of! Confess your villainy, or, degraded as you are, I will strip your borrowed plumes from your base carcass."

As may be easily imagined, this fierce onset on the part of the hotheaded boy created amazement.

Reuben, whose cheek had grown pale with deathly fear, now hardened his nerves to forced composure, and tried to outface his high-spirited cousin.

But he had only time to give him the direct lie, when the excited boy struck him, a fierce blow in the face, and with one snatch stripped the gold lace from his jacket.

What further violence he would have proceeded to is hard to say.

He stopped by finding himself suddenly seized and made prisoner, and then the consciousness of his position suddenly flashed full upon him.

His dauntless breast swelled with indignant rage, as he was eagerly laid hold of.

"Captain Parker," he cried, "I denounce this impostor, who has stolen my name and rank, and disgraced me by his cowardice! Let me have justice, and I am content!"

For once in his life the usually impassive features of Captain Parker were inflamed with passion.

Such an outrage on his quarter-deck, and in his presence, was the highest insult.

"You shall have justice!" he cried, hotly. "By six to-morrow a court-martial shall try you for this conduct, and if you cannot prove that he is not your superior officer you shall be shot without mercy two hours after!"

Tom struggled to get free, that he might have one more chance of dealing the treacherous dastard a deadly blow.

But in the grip of four stalwart men he was

powerless, though he strained every sinew in his efforts to escape.

It was not till he was loaded with heavy irons that he desisted from his furious struggles to get free, and then, with the consciousness that all hope was over, he allowed himself to be thrust into the usual place of confinement.

A sentry was placed over him, and the general belief was that his hours were numbered.

Left to the loneliness of his imprisonment, our hero had leisure to reflect upon the serious position into which his own rashness had brought him.

Had he calmly prepared his statement against Reuben, and solicited inquiry, the facts might have come out, or even had they not he would have been simply reprimanded and sent back to his duty.

But an open attack on one who, rightly or wrongly, stood as his superior, was an offense for which Captain Parker would entertain no palliation.

Of course, the deliberate lie of Sanderson would destroy his assertions, and he might regard death as the certain punishment for his hasty act.

The brave boy's heart swelled in his breast—even now his fingers clenched eagerly, and his impetuous soul flashed from his eyes.

"If I could only get free," the boy muttered, straining at his manacles—"free for one half-hour—I would wring the lie from his throat."

His bitter reveries ended at last in sleep.

It was the still hour of night when he was gently aroused.

A hand was laid on his mouth, and a voice softly bade him be silent.

Tom looked up and saw that his visitor was Ben Barnacle.

"Is it time?" he asked, sadly. "I did not think I had slept long."

"Speak softly; all is in readiness for you to escape."

"Escape!"

Tom raised his eyes half dreaming, and a wild hope shot through his heart.

But it died away instantly.

"No," he said, "I prefer to remain here till I am tried."

"Don't be foolish, boy. If you are here to-morrow you will as certainly be shot as you are now living."

"Let them shoot me then."

"And have your cousin enjoy the pleasure of seeing you riddled with bullets, while he lives to personate you and defame your name?"

A faint flush swept to the poor boy's features.

"No," he cried; "I will escape if only for that. Let them shoot me down in the attempt. I shall not die a felon's death."

"You need not die at all. Give me your hands. Good. They are small, and will slip through these irons easily. There. Now your legs. So. Can you stand? If so, follow me, but as stealthily as a cat."

Released from his irons, which his deliverer took off with adroit and noiseless celerity, Tom stood erect.

"Softly," Ben Barnacle whispered. "I have quieted the sentry for a time; if he should wake I will wring his neck. A moment, while I tell you our plans. The middies on this ship believe your statement; they are disgraced by the presence of your cousin, and, anxious to wipe off the stain of his cowardice, purpose taking the vessel he lost to-day; it is still under the guns of the fort—we can cut her out. What say you? Are you willing to share the danger?"

Tom replied by a nervous pressure of the speaker's hand.

"I owe you more than life," he said, fervently.

"No words—follow in silence."

It was quite dark.

They passed the sentry who lay outside the door, breathing heavily, and apparently in a fit.

Ben Barnacle led his young companion down to the lower hold, where he saw Bob Hauler, Jerry Mizzen, little Kanak, and the whole of the middies belonging to the ship.

Their looks told of their adventurous enterprise.

A silent pressure of hands, and then, one by one, they crept out of the lower port-hole, where two boats had been noiselessly lowered.

In silence they took their places, and before their daring attempt was discovered, their muffled oars had taken them out of sight of the ship.

A deafening roar of artillery startled the officers and men of the *Arethusa* from their slumber.

They looked towards the shore and saw the whole of the forts enveloped in sheets of flame as the cannon belched forth their destruction, yells and cries of conflict arose on the air, and in the midst of the vivid flare of the guns, Captain Parker distinguished the figure of our fearless hero, leading on a small band of followers

to meet the onset of legions of pirates, who swarmed from every side.

Dumfounded by the act, he ordered the frigate to be brought up for action.

But as abruptly as it had commenced, the conflict ceased, and the forts and ships were enveloped in darkness.

The two boats' crews reached the corvette unperceived, but at the same time a body of pirates arrived there with the same intent, and the two parties thus unexpectedly meeting, at once engaged in sharp and deadly fray.

Alarmed by the tumult, the batteries and ships began to open fire, and the daring adventurers would have been annihilated if Tom had not conceived the audacious plan of driving the ship boldly in shore, and running the gauntlet of the pirate fleet.

Heading an impetuous charge, he drove the last of their assailants over the sides, and with guns hastily loaded, ran into the midst of the fleet, opening fire as the vessel cut through, and scattering the double broadside among the pirate barks, which were too closely packed to return the fire without injury to each other, and with scarcely a man wounded, Tom drew the ship they had so gallantly cut out away from all danger from fort or fleet.

This maneuver placed the pirate fleet between them and the British ships, and when their loud hurrahs had somewhat subsided, Ben Barnacle called all hands together, and thus harangued them:

"Now, my lads, we've cut out this gallant craft, shall we take her to the fleet and be tried and sentenced for acting without orders, as well as for setting our brave comrade free, and quitting the ship? I say, no! We have most of us been torn from our homes, and shall get little thanks for anything we do for the British flag. Therefore, let us salvage for ourselves. Let us scour the seas of these pirates, and repay ourselves with their treasures. Let us all be rovers free, and choose a leader who shall help us to defy any power to subdue or take us."

The loud and prolonged cheer that followed his speech caused Tom to suspect that the whole affair had been previously planned.

He remained silent, however, and Bob went on:

"Now that's settled we must choose a leader. We want one who is as brave as a lion, skillful in seamanship, able to command, daring and generous. That leader is here—Captain Tom Drake! We've helped him from unjust punishment, but we'll not let him go back to death. We've seen that he has the right stuff in him, and know that he'll never desert us, or yield while a bit of our flag holds together. Choose, then, with one voice for Captain Tom. Cheer to proclaim him our leader, then one shot to say farewell to the frigate, and let them follow and take us when they can."

The cheer that succeeded this harangue was so loud and prolonged that our hero was deafened by it.

He heard his name vociferated by every throat, and a daring pride arose in his heart.

Giving one glance in the direction of the frigate, he allowed himself to be carried away by the tumultuous enthusiasm of the crew.

And as Ben Barnacle fired the farewell salute at the frigate, the air rang with the name of CAPTAIN TOM DRAKE.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN TOM BRINGS DOWN THE FRIGATE'S FLAG.

THE acclamations of the crew, who had so stanchly proclaimed him their leader, had scarcely died away before Tom was called upon to exercise those qualities which were to prove him worthy of the dignity conferred upon him.

Captain Parker had witnessed his gallant cutting-out exploit with strange interest, and had got his ship hastily in trim for action, when a lurid light following the darkness which had hid Tom's course from him, revealed the plucky little corvette running through the very midst of the pirates, cannonading them as she passed.

"Mr. Burley!" Captain Parker cried, "we must follow and rescue that boy; his daring has taken him among the pirate fleet!"

"I don't think, sir, any ship would get out again from such a trap."

"Nonsense! an English ship can do anything. Ah! do you see that, Mr. Burley? He has got his ship through. By Heaven, they're off! He's running away with his prize! Send up a light to bring them to, or, by God, we shall lose the corvette after all!"

Lieutenant Burley sprang to the quarter-deck, and an instant after a blue light went up from the ship.

Captain Parker, who was anxiously watching the result, rushed to the deck like a madman.

"They defy us!" he cried. "Pipe all hands to the guns—crowd all sail! By Heaven, they shall not escape!"

Tom understood the meaning of the signal sent from the frigate.

It was a summons for him to heave to, and surrender his ship.

At first his intention might have been to do so, but since he had trodden its deck as its commander, a new spirit was infused into him; he felt himself a monarch where he trod, and a resolution to die rather than yield crept upon him.

The frigate had sailed around by the forts, and with all press of canvas was on his track.

He looked around, and saw his daring crew gathered at the guns and awaiting his commands.

No sign of yielding was in their looks.

Captain Tom sprang to the top of the capstan.

"Run up a flag," he cried. "Let them see we will never yield; and bring a gun aft to reply to them if they creep too close."

A black flag, hastily put together by Ben Barnacle, was run up from the mast.

As its folds fluttered in the air a shot was fired from the frigate, and a stern voice came across the water calling on them to surrender.

Captain Tom was standing by the main mast when the huge ball, hurled from the frigate's side, tore up the water in front of his ship.

He had the opportunity then of lying to and taking his chance of pardon, or of hurling defiance at his pursuers, and hazarding the risk of rebellion.

He chose the latter.

"Reply to them with a gun," he cried; "let them know that we defy their power. The ship we stand on we mean to keep, and so long as a timber holds together we will fight for the flag that waves over our heads!"

A loud report followed his words, and the iron missile sped to the frigate's hull.

Ben Barnacle had aimed it.

It brought down the mizzen-mast, and, for the time, crippled her in her pursuit.

As Tom spoke he happened to look up.

The flash of the cannon showed him the sable flag floating at his mizzen-peak.

He had not noticed it before, but now as it fluttered above his head, the memory of Minnie's vision flashed to his mind, and his cheek went pale, and a creeping chill stole over his frame.

In a moment he recovered himself.

His crew were crowding all sail, and the corvette—a fast sailer—was rapidly traveling over the vast waters.

The frigate, thrown into confusion by the loss of her mast, hung behind, and a good chance was now given for the *Thunder* to escape.

A grim smile curled the lips of Ben Barnacle as he stood resting on the rammer behind the gun he had aimed with such effect.

"We have crossed the Rubicon now," he said, with a defiant laugh. "If they take us now they will deal with us as pirates."

They had loaded and run out another gun.

The frigate, though brought to by the damage, was hastily preparing to give the runaway a broadside.

Her object was evidently to sink the corvette.

The eagle-eyed Tom Drake discerned their object as they maneuvered to take his vessel at a disadvantage.

Standing by the mast, he issued his commands with such cool precision, and displayed such consummate seamanship, that the hearts of his crew were won by his first effort.

The frigate had no chance of using her guns as she desired, and fired the broadside at last to such little purpose that the corvette swung around unharmed, and a derisive laugh arose from her crew.

Then Tom jumped down to the deck, a brilliant light shone in his eyes, a rich color deepened his cheeks, his breast swelled with proud emotion.

Putting his speaking-trumpet to his lips he sang out boldly:

"Captain Parker, you have asked us to surrender; Captain Tom Drake sends you his reply."

Tom sprang to the gun his men had run out; making deliberate aim, he applied the lighted tow to the touch-hole, and stood back to watch the effect.

The flash and report were succeeded by a crash, and the frigate's flag came tumbling down to her deck.

A cry of rage came from her officers, but the crew of Tom's ship set up an enthusiastic hurrah, and crowded joyfully around her skillful leader.

"Now," said Tom, "let them seek us if they

dare; run up more canvas; they'll have a sharp chase before they bring us to."

Every stitch of canvas was spread, and in less than two hours Tom had the satisfaction of being out in deep water, far from the guns of his majesty's frigate.

By Tom's direction the ship was run into the nearest port, in order that the valuable cargo it had on board might be disposed of, and such necessities purchased as was required for their desperate cruise.

The corvette was a splendidly-built vessel, and though it only carried twenty guns, was so fast a sailer, and so easily managed, that Tom had no wish to tread a better deck.

Her equipments, too, were in good condition, and it was marvelous how she could ever have been got into such a disaster as that which left her helpless under the guns of the pirate forts at Algiers.

Nothing but the rankest cowardice and incompetency could have brought about such a result, and Tom could not help feeling that had he been there, as he should have been instead of his cousin Reuben, he would have run his vessel from under the enemy's guns, or have had a hard fight for victory before he thought of surrender.

Still he could not find fault with the mischance that had placed him in so splendid a position.

The chief things he found himself in want of were provisions, and costumes for his crew.

These were soon purchased, and Tom himself trod his own quarter-deck attired in a magnificent dress as a boy-captain—his first appearance being the signal for a succession of honest cheers that sent the hot blood gushing to his heart, and caused him to vow that nothing but death should destroy his prestige and power.

His boy-crew he made some additions to.

They were all fantastically dressed, some as Greeks, others as Mediterranean pirates; all were well armed—all resolved to follow their chieftain to the death.

Ben Barnacle, though not less reserved and strangely silent as before, displayed the most devoted affection towards Tom, and little Kanak was never happy out of his sight.

As for Bob Hauler and Jerry Mizzen, they seemed happier even than when they were a brace of cunning smugglers; they were unscrupulous gentlemen, and cast many an eye across the sea in quest of any vessel which they hoped would turn out a rich prize.

Some time was occupied before Tom had got his ship in perfect trim for every emergency, and now that he was prepared for friend or foe, he resolved to run back and try to meet one of the Barbary or Algerine pirates, with whom the British vessels had had a most unlucky encounter, which had resulted in their being dispersed with great loss.

Tom's cheek burned when he heard of this.

On the fifteenth day of their cruise, at about daybreak, a sail was reported coming towards them.

Without pausing to consider the weight or probable superiority of his antagonist, Tom no sooner saw that it was a Barbary cruiser than he gave chase.

A spirited pursuit of three-quarters of an hour brought them within cannonading distance of the pirate.

She attempted no disguise or flight.

Confident in her own powers, she lay to for the attack, and then, broadside to broadside, the engagement began.

The fight was hot.

Shots flew about freely.

Even Bob Hauler and Jerry Mizzen seemed to think it anything but relishing as they dodged from the continuous peppering.

As for Ben Barnacle, he was in his element.

His dark eyes burned with a wild light, and a fierce, glad cry escaped him.

The guns of the corvette told upon her opponent.

In the heat of the fight Ben turned towards Tom, who was calmly directing the attack.

"They are getting ready to board us," he said. "Shall we fight them on our deck?"

"No!" cried Tom, his dark eyes ablaze, "no! we will board them on their ship, and then bring down their flag over their heads!"

He gave the word, and his crew, gathering up pike, pistol and cutlass, followed him to the shrouds.

First in the daring attack, Tom leaped to the enemy's deck, and instantly found himself encircled by a dozen fierce, turbaned pirates, cutting furiously at him with their tremendous cimeters.

Tom had hard work to defend himself, and stood a narrow chance of being cut down, when Ben Barnacle leaped down amongst them.

He had snatched up a heavy battle-ax.

With this he brained the pirate who menaced

Tom; then, swinging it around, dealt swift havoc among them.

By this time Tom's crew had swarmed to the attack, and a hot conflict at close quarters ensued.

At first it seemed likely to go against our hero, the pirates so outnumbered his band; but his own cool heroism, and the desperate character of his gallant crew repelled every onset of the corsairs, and drove them inch by inch to the stern of their vessel.

Their leader, a fierce, gigantic corsair, had anticipated an easy victory, and his fury knew no bounds as the tide of battle seemed to go against him.

He had an immense quantity of plunder on board, besides some very beautiful captives whom he was anxious not to lose.

He had been so used to knocking British vessels about that he never expected any trouble from so small a craft as Tom's ship.

Looking savagely around for the leader of a crew of boys who fought so well, his glaring eyes lighted on our hero, who, with his sword reddened from tip to hilt, was waving his crew on to victory.

Tom heard a fearful yell, then a faint cry from one of his boy crew, and the next instant the tall, bearded corsair chief stood before him, his blood-red cimeter describing a swift circle above his head, as he made a wild swoop at Tom, in hopes of cutting him down as easily as he had cut down the unhappy middy.

But he found better metal here.

Captain Tom met his furious attack with undaunted coolness.

He found that he was confronted by the corsair chief, and with impetuous pride he waved back Ben Barnacle, who had tried to force a combat with the pirate.

The corsair was too incensed at the slaughter on his decks to heed Tom's gallant and stanch heroism.

He saw before him a mere stripling, and laughed at the idea of his contending against him.

There was a contempt in his angry eye as he cleft at Tom's skull.

The boy met him with a cool bravery that amazed him.

Had his sweeping cuts not been well parried, Tom's head would have rolled from his shoulders; but our hero was an adept in the art of swordsmanship, and parried the heavy cuts of the pirate with quick and scientific success.

Tom had not expected so desperate an encounter—the idea, too, of being chopped down was not at all pleasant.

Still, he felt glad of this chance of single conflict with a redoubted leader of pirates.

Should he vanquish him he would gain a prestige over his daring crew, and if he should fall—

Tom thought of Minnie and his mother, and as the pirate, with grating teeth, and eyes flaming from their sockets, tried to batter down his guard, he stepped swiftly aside, and parrying one of the many cuts made at his head, made a sudden leap, and lunged his sword full at the corsair's throat.

Tom's sword reached the pirate in an undefended part; he felt the keen blade traveling swiftly into his throat, but the hilt had struck against his chin before he could realize that the fierce fray was ended so abruptly and so fatally.

He gave one wild, gurgling cry, and as Tom drew his sharp weapon forth, tried to clutch it with his hand, and to cut at his slightly-built conqueror.

The hot blood followed the withdrawing of Tom's sword.

It gushed over him as he saw the huge pirate stagger; but bent on his own defense, Tom thrust at him again, and sent his deadly weapon home once more.

This time in the pirate's heart.

The corsair chief was possessed of immense strength, and wondrous power of life.

He had cut at Tom, and glared upon him with a deadly look of hate when the boy's sword was forcing its way through his throat.

Even with the point at his heart, his iron soul could not believe in being subdued, and he tried to grip his opponent with his hands and squeeze the life out of him.

But his strength was passed.

A sickly hue overspread his swarthy countenance, his eyes rolled in mad agony; his hands clenched; and with his huge chest laboring in one dreadful throb, he dropped to the deck, and lay at Tom's feet—dead!

The death of their ruthless leader brought the fight to a close; the corsairs had lain down their weapons and craved quarter, and Tom bent over his dead adversary.

He could see that he had been a pitiless and a

savage man of blood and passion; there were lines about his mouth and his shaven brow that proved him to have a will of iron and a soul hardened to the most merciless deeds.

Even in death a stern glare of ferocious cruelty shaped itself on his features.

Tom could not help feeling that he had ended the brutal career of a man who rejoiced in the most desperate iniquity; and yet, as he gazed upon him, stiffening in death, a strange feeling of interest stole over him, and he almost wished he had not slain him.

He was recalled from this reverie by the cheers of his gallant crew, who had hauled down the pirate's flag, and securely bound those who had surrendered, and were now busily engaged in ransacking the ship.

A scream from below warned Tom that there were ladies on board, and he was wondering whether they were captives or the willing slaves of the pirates, when Bob Hauler came aft, and respectfully touching his forelock, said:

"There's a lady in the cabin below, sir, we don't know what to do with; 'spects she's been belonging to that turbaned gentleman you put out of his troubles. She only screams when we look at her. What shall we do?"

"Leave her to me," Tom replied; "I will see her; perhaps she may have been the mistress of this fearful man—in which case, ruthless though he may have been, she will merit our sympathy."

"Ay, ay," Bob Hauler said, "he's been a very devil by all account. I was half inclined to send a bullet through his hide when you were fighting, for he seemed savage enough to eat you, but Ben Barnacle stayed me; 'praps you like it better, for it's something to have conquered a devil like this."

He spurned the prone carcass with his foot.

"Let me take your sword, sir, and clean it," he said; "it's in a precious state. It's done its duty, as you have, sir—pardon my freedom; but if we wouldn't all go to the end of the world with you now we should be cowards—not fit to draw breath in these scenes of glory. She's a fine ship we've took; and I make bold to say, she'd never have been took if our admirable skipper—you, sir—had been her captain."

Tom felt grateful for the compliment, and handing Bob Hauler the red sword, descended to the pirate's cabin.

It was a most luxuriously furnished apartment.

The treasures of a world were heaped there.

Rich fabrics, costly treasures, gems of most wondrous beauty, were strewn in all directions.

The walls were hung with the richest silk—the ceiling was fringed with solid gold—the windows looking out on the sea were screened with the choicest lace.

Beautiful carpets sprang beneath the tread—brilliant mirrors reflected the thousand and one elegancies of the apartment.

But our hero's attention was first drawn towards its occupant—a young maiden who could not have been more than fifteen summers.

She was of the fairest and most exquisite form, and her features dazzled the gaze by their superb loveliness.

Her dress was of the rarest materials, and in exquisite harmony with her Oriental style of beauty.

Her softly molded limbs and finely tinted bosom were but half concealed by her robes.

Pearls and trinkets hung from her matchless hair, which fell in wild profusion over her neck and shoulders.

She raised her fine languishing eyes as Tom respectfully entered, and a faint flush stole to her alabaster cheeks.

Our hero had doffed his cap, and standing respectfully in the doorway, with the scarlet flush of battle on his handsome features, and its vivid light beaming from his eyes, looked, to the full, the brave, daring hero of a woman's love.

As Tom first put his foot on the threshold of the luxurious cabin, the young girl drew back, and gave a startled cry, putting up her roundly-molded arms in wild terror; a deathly pallor overspread her delicate cheeks, but her dark eyes, which were swimming in tears, flashed with a passionate fire as if she scorned the weakness of her nature which made her afraid.

But as he stepped before her, and bowed with princely politeness, she ventured to take a second look at him between her alabaster fingers, and finding he was not the desperate ruffian she had expected, suffered him to approach a little nearer.

Before, however, he could reach her, she uttered a second startled cry, and slipping from the velvet couch, ran to the furthest end of the cabin.

As she glided hastily down, one beautiful limb, half hidden by her silken robes, was for a moment revealed; and now, as she stood panting at the

end of the apartment, her white bosom was visible beneath her coquettish jacket as it arose and fell with her timid emotion, and Tom thought he had never seen such a little model of perfect loveliness.

Making a gesture that he intended her no harm, Tom again advanced.

But the young girl no sooner saw him lift his hand than she screamed wildly, and plucking a miniature poniard from her embroidered vest, turned its point towards her fair bosom.

In another moment the sharp weapon would have pierced her flesh, but Tom was swift and sure in his movements.

With one bound he had leaped to her side, and while one hand seized her wrist, his other arm encircled her slender waist, and drew her heaving bosom to his, while with gentle force he took the jeweled weapon from between her slender fingers.

She made no resistance after he had seized her, but lay in his arms as passive as a captive bird—her large wondrous eyes dilating as she gazed into his frank countenance—her ripe lips apart—a faint flush stealing to her waxen features.

Tom did not know how to make her understand his intentions, as he was totally unacquainted with her language; so he did what he thought was the best thing to assure her.

Gallantly pressing her hand to his breast, he drew her closer to him, and kissed her with respectful gallantry.

Then smoothing back from her white forehead the rich masses of hair which had escaped from the circlet of opals and pearls, he allowed her to release herself, and gently led her back to her couch.

She understood by his manner that she was safe from molestation, and a look of grateful gladness settled on her face.

She seemed to comprehend, too, that he was master there, for she folded her arms meekly before her, and followed his movements with her large black eyes.

Tom was glad that he had got on so far with her, and he now proceeded to make an examination of the place.

His wildest dreams were realized as he gazed around.

Never could he have conceived of rarer treasures than were here displayed.

The wealth contained in that cabin alone was worth the ransom of a score of kings.

It was evident the maiden had not been alone. A table that literally sparkled with gems was heaped with delicious sweetmeats and fruits, piled on vessels of solid gold, and a goblet of massive gold, the brim gleaming with diamonds, was half filled with the richest wine.

Two smaller goblets of the same precious make were overturned, as if hastily left.

Tom turned from these to the young girl.

Was it possible that she was in any way connected with the ruthless pirate he had slain on deck?

Looking at her exquisitely molded form, and contrasting her almost childish purity of countenance with the brutal visage of the corsair, it seemed out of all possibility; yet there were articles of male costume about the place, and by the couch was a splendid turban and a massive cimeter, which must have belonged to the ruthless corsair.

Our hero did not want the turban, though the gold crescent in front of it was studded with diamonds of the first water; but the cimeter attracted him.

He stooped and picked it up from the floor.

The blade was of the finest Damascus steel—sharpened to the keenness of a razor, and so well tempered that at a touch it bent double and sprang back with a whizzing sound.

Its belt was set with an immense emerald almost as large as an egg, and rounded off smooth. A gold guard protected the holder's hand.

"This is a prize, indeed!" Tom cried, proudly balancing it in his hand. "It shall be mine, and no other hand shall wield it while I live."

He was so intently engaged in fastening the splendid weapon to his belt, that he did not observe the young girl glide from the couch, and with a face colorless as marble, creep from the cabin.

He missed her the instant she was gone, and hurried after her as she fled like a fawn up the hatch-way.

Quickly as he followed, she was on deck before he had time to stay her.

He heard her swift inquiring cry as her wild glance swept around the scene of carnage, while she ran to and fro, seeking some one among the slain, till her gaze rested on the cruel visage of the giant corsair, when, giving a thrilling, horrifying shriek, she fell on the deck, apparently senseless.

As Tom sprang forward to raise her, she leaped to her feet.

In a moment she had again fallen beside the pirate, and lifted his massive head, raising it higher and higher, till it touched her bosom, and her tears fell to the lifeless face.

It was piteous to see her grief. How she raved in agony, screaming as the dead man gave no answer to her cries to call him back to life.

She loosened the dark masses of her hair, and wiped the blood-stains from his face, trying with her white fingers to close the horrid gash in his bearded throat; and when she found that he was past all hope—that there was no beating of the heart that had so lately throbbed in his powerful chest—her eyes swept around in search of him whose murderous hand had let forth the pirate's life.

Tom was standing near her, thinking remorsefully that he was the guilty one, when the young girl's sweeping glance rested upon him, piercing to his soul, and reading there all she sought to know.

Such a look of awful agony and horror settled in the maiden's eyes that Tom was touched to the heart; a chilly, rigid expression fixed her pallid features, and with a low moan of soul-wrung agony, she sank prone on the dead corsair's breast.

Tom stole softly towards her—she was insensible.

He took her hand; it was clammily, deathly cold.

He raised her beautiful face—it was like the face of a corpse.

He lifted her tenderly in his arms, and carried her away.

His heart smote him as he saw a slender stream of blood trickling from her mouth.

As he was descending the hatchway, a girl, attired as an Oriental slave, encountered him.

She was paralyzed with fright, but had gathered strength enough to creep from her hiding-place and came forth to see after the young maiden, her mistress.

She followed him to the cabin, and with many ejaculations knelt down beside the inanimate form of her mistress; and our hero, leaving her to bring the hapless girl to consciousness, hurried again on deck.

Considerable clearance had taken place under the directions of Ben Barnacle; the dead had been thrown overboard, with the exception of the corsair chief, whom they were now preparing to commit to the deep.

Tom came to the side as they lifted the pirate from the deck, and took his last look upon his formidable foe.

Even in death the corsair looked the ruthless man of blood and rapine.

His hands were tightly clenched, and a cruel, savage look had settled on his face.

As they raised him above the netting, the grim ferocity of the set features seemed to deepen in hate; and Tom almost started at the cold, relentless expression of the dull, glazed eyes, as their fixed stare seemed to meet him.

The sailors gave a hearty "ahoy!" and the next instant dropped the pirate over.

The splash sent its cold dash into Tom's face.

For a second or so the transparent waves seethed over the rigid visage and huge frame, then with a cold gurgle plashed over him, and the pirate sank down.

Sank deeper and deeper, till pitiless face, and staring, cruel eyes were out of sight; then our hero turned thoughtfully away, while his crew, with one hearty cheer, proclaimed the disappearance of the chief of the corsairs.

Anxious as he was to go below and look after the hapless maiden, whose association with and tender love of the pitiless pirate strangely interested him, Tom felt it his duty to stay upon deck, and direct the disposal of the vast booty.

Not one of the pirates had been spared—their crimes had been too notorious; but there were many on board the vessel who had taken no part in their deeds of violence, but had been hired or compelled to attend to the cooking and other work.

These were permitted to remain.

Several captive maidens were on board.

These were allotted a cabin till means could be found to put them ashore.

All that now remained was to decide respecting the booty and the vessel.

The Barbary cruiser was a heavier ship than Tom's; she carried more guns, was better equipped, and built for greater speed.

Had the corsairs not been certain of victory, and hove to for the encounter, Tom would not have easily come up with them.

These facts, and the difficulty of removing the immense plunder stowed in her holds, and, indeed, crammed wherever room could be found, induced Tom to entertain the idea of quitting the corvette, and risking his fortunes on the pirate ship.

So when the wounded were placed under surgical care, and the numbers and names of the killed had been taken, he called the remainder of the crew to the poop, and put the question.

The middies as well as the others were overjoyed at the idea.

It was more glorious to have a ship of their own, instead of the one they had run away with. Tom's propositions were consequently most cordially welcomed.

The only question was, what they should do with the corvette.

Ben Barnacle decided that.

"Let us send her back as a present for those who could neither take nor keep her."

Tom's eyes started at the thought.

He gave the word, and in a short space of time the powder, shot, and all valuables were removed on board the Barbary cruiser.

"We'll send a message with her," Ben Barnacle said; and taking a paint-pot and brush, he wrote on the mast:

"We took this ship from under the guns of the pirate. Captain Tom, who wants her no longer, sends her back as a present for the frigate, in hopes they will be able to keep her when they catch her."

Tom smiled when Ben had finished.

Then the corvette's sails were trimmed, her helm secured, and the last of Tom's crew having quitted her, she went swiftly on her journey across the seas.

It was nearly dark when the wind carried her out of their sight, and then as Tom's crew gave her a farewell cheer, Ben Barnacle, who had run up our hero's flag in place of the pirate's pennon, hurled a bottle over the new vessel's bows, and christened her by her new name, the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*.

Captain Tom Drake and his boy crew had good reason to be satisfied with the success of their first enterprise.

There were treasures enough in the vessel's hold to have made each of them rich for life.

Any who desired to quit their companions could have gone away well satisfied, had gain alone been their object.

But the boys were animated by another influence.

They had been so basely treated under the stern discipline of Captain Parker, and the ferocious brutality of the malignant Sanderson, that their new life of liberty had a charm for them nothing could subdue.

Even the risk they ran of being taken and treated as pirates by any British ship sent out to pursue them, only enhanced the excitement of their career.

Besides, they were devotedly attached to their gallant young leader, and not one of them would have deserted him while he desired them to serve under his flag.

All thoughts, then, of returning to their duty on the frigate were ended, and Captain Parker, who was hotly chasing them, and imagined he had only to come up with them to surrender, was destined to find out his mistake when they should fall in with each other.

The corvette had not gone out of their sight before Tom Drake, having seen that nothing required his further presence on deck, descended to the cabin of the Eastern maiden.

Bob Hauler and Jerry Mizzen, who saw him go below, and pretty well guessed whither he was bound, indulged in sundry comicalities one with the other, giving vent to remarks that would have got them into pretty hot water had they been overheard by Tom, or even by Ben Barnacle, who was stanchly jealous of his young chieftain's fame.

The worthy pair of smuggling gentlemen, only waiting for the conclusion of the fight—for to do them justice they were no cowards, and had that day given many a fierce pirate a chop on the skull or a dig in the ribs that had proved a settler—had sneaked down below to gloat over the accumulated heaps of treasure, and had stolen from the cabin while it was empty the large goblet containing the rich wine, and now, snugly ensconced under the boom sheets, were getting rather elevated—the wine being of such quality as they had never before had the felicity of tasting.

For the present we must leave them.

When our hero entered the cabin the corsair maiden was lying in a trance-like stupor, extended on the couch. The slave was bending over her.

On Tom's entrance she waved her hand as a gesture for him to tread silently, and gave him a look that told him as plainly as words that he was not wanted there, at least by them.

Having given a glance at the pale girl who lay breathing heavily, but apparently unconscious, our hero would have obeyed the slave girl's behests and withdrawn, if the corsair maiden her-

self had not, by a feeble movement of her arm, indicated that he was to approach.

Advancing hastily, but with noiseless, diffident step, he stood before her.

She lay with her eyes partially closed—the lids quivering, and steeped with tears—her cheeks were ashy pale, and wore a frozen, woe-begone look that smote our hero to the soul.

Her bosom was heaving hard, as if she tried to repress her emotions; her lips were slightly apart, and had lost all their bright richness; her eyes were dull and strangely sad.

When Tom was near enough, she raised herself slightly, and outstretching her white arms, took both his hands in hers, and looked him full in the face with such a gaze—so plaintively reproachful, so sorrowfully accusing, that he was forced to avert his face, and hide his quivering lip.

After she had fixed him with her stare of stupor for some moments, she drew his hand closer to her bosom, and drooping her pale face, burst into a bitter flood of tears.

Tom tried to withdraw his right hand—the hand that had killed the corsair chief—but as if she guessed what was passing in his mind, she held it more tightly, letting her tears fall faster, as if to wash its stains of blood away.

For half an hour, at least, she sobbed as if her heart would break, the slave girl doing all in her power to assuage her grief—calling upon her as "Zeila," which Tom surmised to be her name.

She released his hand at last, and the noble boy, sinking to one knee, respectfully kissed her hand, and silently quitted the cabin, and ascended to the deck.

Meanwhile, Bob Hauler and his mate, the redoubtable Jerry Mizzen, had been pulling at the goblet, till, having drained its last dregs, they became quarrelsome, and some not over-polite words were followed by a smart interchange of smacks—Bob Hauler getting a spank in the eye that made him see about twenty stars between him and Jerry, while the latter individual got such a smeller on his nose, that the nasal organ arose to the size of a young pudding.

The melee was wound up by Jerry seizing the handsome goblet, and felling Bob by a knock which nearly crushed his skull, at which juncture Ben Barnacle sent two of the middies with buckets of water, with which they drenched them to the skin, and drove them, half-sobered, to their hammocks.

Jerry Mizzen sneaked off triumphantly with the valuable goblet, which he had, unperceived, concealed in the hinder part of his loose trousers; but which, forgetting all about as he was preparing to turn in, he let fall on the snout of a middy who slept beneath his hammock, awakening the youngster in such a state of alarm, that, thinking the ship was boarded by pirates, he sprang to his feet and dealt Jerry a blow in the wind that knocked him off his feet like a thunder-bolt, and stretched him on the boards, where he lay gasping.

* * * * *

A week of fine weather attended our young adventurers in their first cruise with their new ship, and a happy time of it they had under their boyish leader.

They had liberally helped themselves to the costly dresses and weapons of the corsair, and proved a handsome crew when they assembled to hear the orders of their young captain.

Our hero had been rather sad of late—his girlish captive began to exercise a strange influence over him.

For the first few days she had kept to her apartment, during which time he had been continually by her side.

She seemed to be getting over her feelings on account of the corsair's death, and though she shivered slightly when her gaze rested on Tom, she was evidently pleased to have him in her presence.

And the gallant boy—whose whole thoughts were of his girlish love, Minnie Atherton, whose love-gift rested at his heart—felt grieved that the corsair maiden's forlorn condition forced him to occupy the dangerous position of her protector: for, boy as he was, he could not fail to see that her eyes lighted with gladness at his coming, and that her bosom swelled with passionate emotion when her soft arm reposed beside his.

True as he was to Minnie, he could not disguise from himself that his fair captive enthralled him by the fascination of her beauty, and by one look could stir the depths of his impulsive soul.

Still he could not conquer the sympathy and interest he felt for the young girl.

He longed to learn her tongue—to learn what connection or relationship there was between her and the ruthless pirate leader whom he had sent to his long account.

On her part, Zeila—as her attendant called her—seemed as eager to converse with him.

She tried to make him understand her by signs,

and talked to him in the Oriental tongue till Tom began to comprehend her words, and taught her their meaning in English.

It was astonishing how soon they picked up an idea of each other's language.

Zeila was a very assiduous teacher, and our hero proved himself so apt a pupil that in a surprisingly short space of time he was able to comprehend her when she told him her history.

She was an Arabian by birth, but at an early age, when she was quite a child, had been taken to Turkey, and promised in marriage to a wealthy young merchant.

A favorite attendant of a rich pasha—Seyd Ali—had, however, seen her, and resolved to get possession of her for his master.

The young merchant, however—whom she feared and disliked—heard of the plan, and fearing to openly claim her, entered her chamber one night and carried her off.

A corsair captain, Kaboo Raba, who had previously made love to her, and been repulsed by her father, heard her shrieks, and hastening to her rescue, encountered her abductor, and slew him with her in his arms.

He was seized while his sword was yet red with the merchant's heart's blood, and thrust into prison, and the next morning round her an unwilling inmate of the pasha's harem.

The treatment with him was more gentle than she had expected.

He refrained from entering her chamber, preferring to wait till he could join her alone.

But one stormy night the palace was in flames, and in the midst of the confusion Kaboo Raba burst in, followed by half a dozen desperate corsairs, slew the pasha on the threshold, hurled him into the flames, and bore away herself and half the women of the harem.

She was carried senseless on board the corsair's vessel.

He had been desperately wounded, and when she came to herself, she felt bound in gratitude to tend upon him.

He had scarcely recovered, when his merciless crew, who had severely treated and thrown overboard the pasha's captured wives, arose in mutiny, and demanded that she, too, should be cast into the sea, it being a law with them that no woman should be on board.

By becoming his wife she was saved from death, and strange to say, her abhorrence of the desperate corsair changed into passionate love, and she chose to follow his fortune till the fatal hour when he met his death at our hero's hands.

Captain Tom felt more a man of mettle when he heard what a redoubtable chieftain he had vanquished; for Zeila told him tales of his exploits that proved him to have been a desperate and daring adventurer, and a perfect demon when aroused, and one whose merciless instincts were only satiated in blood.

Having told him her history, Zeila was as eager to learn his.

She heard, with brightened color, the recital of his escape from the *Arethusa*, but started as if she had been stricken by a bullet when he told her of his love for Minnie Atherton.

Then Tom knew what dangerous ground he stood upon.

The corsair maiden had transferred her affections from her dead lover to him.

The discovery was not unmixed with a pleasurable pride.

She was so beautiful, and seemed so pure, that it seemed no sin to permit her love.

And the corsair maiden, now that she had overcome her anguish at the pirate's fate, used all the endearments of her nature to chain our hero to her side.

Tom was seated with her one evening in the luxurious cabin, when word was brought him that a heavy frigate had been sighted in their track.

Our hero hurried to the deck.

A few minutes' careful survey through his telescope enabled him to make out the coming ship to be their old pursuer, the *Arethusa*.

She had evidently sighted them, for she began to crowd more canvas, and shaped her course directly after them.

Captain Tom handed his glass to his first officer, and looking around on the eager faces of his crew, said:

"The frigate is in our track. Up, lads, we must take the wind out of her sails, for I mean to run home, and get away again before she can overhaul us."

CHAPTER VII.

A PRICE IS PUT ON TOM'S HEAD.

We must return awhile to old Gregory and his ward, whom, with Tom's mother, we left at the old-fashioned mansion by the seaside.

Tom's abrupt departure had mystified them. Old Gregory raved for three days like a madman, and frightened Mrs. Drake till she went about the house white as a ghost.

Her half-sister, Mrs. Harpy, made good the occasion to say all she could against Tom's character.

And Sanderson, before he departed, spread the report that Tom had fallen into dissipated company, and gone on board in a state of drunkenness.

A day after he had gone Reuben Harpy suddenly disappeared.

It was reported that he had been seized by the press-gang at Tom's instigation.

Old John Gregory hotly scouted the idea, and when Mrs. Harpy came before him in violent hysterics, he ordered her out of the room.

A change came over Minnie Atherton after Tom had gone.

Day by day she waited, expecting to hear from him; and day by day she grew paler and more sad as the expected letter failed to arrive.

She thought it cruel of him not to write; but her pure faith was placed in his honor, and she still believed that the time would come when the mystery of his silence would be cleared away.

Very often she wandered to their old tryst-place by the pleasant little lake where her skiff lay idle now, for she had no heart to use it—she felt too lonely.

Tom's love there lay like a burning weight at her heart; and sometimes when she feared he might not return, she stole to some secluded hiding-place in the woods and gave way to her tears.

All this time Tom was enduring the galling yoke of his servitude on board the *Arethusa*.

How it would have stung his mettlesome spirit had he known how she suffered for his sake!

Many months had gone by.

Old Gregory was seated in his arm-chair by the bay window overlooking the bay—that window from which he had seen Tom's gallant rescue of his darling Minnie.

The honest-hearted old fellow was recalling the scene now.

He saw Tom in his youthful glow of beauty leaping again into the blue waters, and springing to the bank with Minnie in his arms; and a tear trickled down his cheek as he thought of the change that had taken place.

Minnie was sitting by his knee.

She was very fond of sitting with her guardian since Tom had gone.

The two understood each other's thoughts well, and though our hero's name was seldom mentioned, they knew that each still had faith in the proud-spirited boy.

It was sunset.

The evening chills were creeping over the glorious scene—the sun setting, like molten gold, behind the peak from which Tom had been tumbled into the sea.

A great alteration had taken place in John Gregory—he seemed breaking fast.

"Minnie, darling," he said, abruptly, "do you remember when that—that graceless scamp pulled you out of the lake?"

Minnie sighed.

"I shall never forget, papa."

"Ah! he was a fine lad then. I'm afraid he's gone to the bad now."

"Oh, no!" Minnie cried; "I am sure he is true to us."

"Why don't he write to me, then?" growled old Gregory.

"Perhaps he will come back soon and explain all."

"If he does—the rascal! the scoundrel!—I'll turn him from the door. How dare he steal your heart and run away like this?"

Minnie's eyes filled with tears.

"I wish he would only come back," she said, sadly.

"Yes—yes," John Gregory muttered, "I wish he would come back—I wish he would come back."

The silence that succeeded the old gentleman's words was abruptly broken by the door being suddenly burst open.

Minnie gave a slight scream and sprang to her feet.

For the moment she almost expected to see the graceful figure and handsome face of Tom Drake.

It was not our hero—he was far enough away—but Mrs. Harpy, who, with her face streaming with hypocritical tears, entered quickly, and cried, hysterically:

"I knew it—I knew it! My dear boy—my poor dear boy! That wicked favorite of yours! Oh, my poor Reuben, I shall never see him again!"

Old John Gregory started up in anger.

"The devil take you, and Reuben, too!" he cried; "a precious good job if you never see him again, the cowardly cur!—the—the—hypocritical vagabond!"

Mrs. Harpy forced a fresh flood of tears to her eyes.

"Yes," she exclaimed, "that's how you always are—always against my poor boy. But perhaps you'll believe now what this good man has to say about your favorite and my poor boy."

"Good man! What good man? Who the devil do you mean, woman?"

"This honest mariner," Mrs. Harpy replied, as a seafaring man advanced awkwardly into the room.

He had a weather-beaten, well-salted face, but his features did not bear the impression of an honest tar, as he stood in front of old Gregory, touching his forelock, and scraping his restless feet.

His shifting gaze wandered uneasily about the room till it rested upon Mrs. Harpy's face, when it lit up with a momentary gleam of assurance.

"Well," roared old Gregory, "who the devil are you? And what do you want?"

"I'm Dan Cuttle, your honor," the fellow replied; "at your honor's service."

"Well, you swab—well?"

"This lady, please your honor, wanted me to come and tell your honor about Master Reuben and Master Tom."

"You, sir? And what the devil do you know about them, eh?"

"I served in the same ship as Tom Drake, sir! was under him before he got into disgrace, sir."

"Go on—you vagabond—go on."

"The man will tell you," Mrs. Harpy interrupted, "that this favorite Tom of yours, after disgracing himself in every possible way, finished his brilliant career by losing his ship, under circumstances of such rank cowardice that he was disgraced and dismissed."

Mrs. Harpy's cheeks colored with some little shame as she remembered that it was her own boy to whom all this had happened.

Old John Gregory leaped around like a wounded panther.

"What!" he roared, "you brace of liars! Tom a coward! Lost his ship! It's a lie—a lie! and you know it—both of you."

Mrs. Harpy screamed and sank back in a pretended faint.

Minnie, whose face was of a waxen pallor, stepped up to the sailor, and asked him huskily if he spoke the truth.

"It's all true, miss," the fellow answered. "Moreover, when they took the middy's jacket off him he confessed as how he'd got his cousin Reuben took by the press-gang and sent to sea."

"Yes," screamed Mr. Harpy, "the press-gang! My poor boy!"

"I wish the press-gang had you and all," John Gregory yelled. "It's a lie, I say, a lie!"

"Tain't no yarn, your honor. And a nice young devil—saving your presence, miss—he's turned out since—"

"How? Where is he now? Where, sir—where?"

"Running away from the frigate that's after him for the ship he took."

"Took—a ship?" Minnie said, breathlessly.

"Yes, miss; and got all the middies to leave their duty and join him. They've turned pirates, miss, and he calls himself Captain Tom."

"This is a wicked calumny!" old Gregory vociferated, "a base invention—I never will believe it!"

"'Tis as true as gospel, your honor, and if you don't believe me, here's a proclamation you can read."

John Gregory clutched the paper.

Hurriedly he read its contents, Minnie listening pale as a ghost, and scarcely breathing.

"PIRACY! PIRACY! !

"PROCLAMATION.

"£1,000 REWARD

"Will be given to any commander of our ships who shall either slay or take alive Captain Tom Drake, the Boy Buccaneer, now infesting our coasts and defying our power on the high seas.

"Moreover, all our admirals, captains, and other officers of our royal navy, are commanded to take, sink, burn, or destroy his pirate vessel, known as the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, when and wherever found, and to execute as pirates the rebellious midshipmen serving under his flag."

When old Gregory had finished reading, he let the fatal paper fall from his hands, and sank back in a fit.

Minnie flew to his side and raised his head, and as she wiped the beady sweat from his clammy features, Mrs. Harpy, darting her a look of vicious hatred, left the apartment, followed by the sneaking ruffian who had brought the news.

The fellow was a myrmidon in the pay of Sanderson, who was on his way to the place, and had bribed the man to bring the intelligence to old Gregory.

He had Reuben with him.

The cowardly lad had been tried by court-martial for losing his ship, and dismissed with ignominy.

In furtherance of their crafty plan, he was tried under the name of Tom Drake, in order that the disgrace might fall upon our hero.

It nearly broke Mrs. Drake's heart when she heard about her son—the story seemed too well confirmed; yet she could not believe it possible for him to prove a coward.

As for John Gregory, his faith was terribly shaken, and he went about the house in silent moodiness.

A week after, Lieutenant Sanderson arrived.

He brought with him the full particulars of the trial, and represented Tom in a hideous light.

When he thought he had sufficiently prepared the old gentleman's mind, he sent word to Reuben to present himself.

They had got him a forged commission as lieutenant in the navy, Sanderson swearing that Reuben had risen by his own merits.

It was thought that this would be enough to make him replace Tom in John Gregory's affections, but the result was a total failure.

The old gentleman received him coldly, and waved him from his presence.

Sanderson had brought with him a stranger who bore a captain's rank, and who corroborated the tale of Reuben's brave conduct.

His name was Captain Angel.

He was a slightly built man, with a pale, pinched visage; his eyes were of a cold, vacant blue, and when he laughed his teeth glittered like the fangs of a wolf.

He had exceedingly small, white hands, but the fingers were long and pointed.

Looking at them in their supple movements, for they were perpetually entwining restlessly—it was hard to repress the feeling that sharp talons were covered by the white skin.

Neither John Gregory nor Mrs. Drake liked the company of this Captain Angel.

He was very quiet in manner, but he had a stealthy kind of laugh that was strangely repulsive.

There was at times a steel-like glitter in his cold eyes when his gaze rested on the fair face of Minnie Atherton.

The young girl instinctively shrank from him.

She mistrusted his looks from the first moment his steely eyes stared into hers.

Sanderson and his friend Captain Angel were constantly at the house.

John Gregory did not like their presence there; he hinted as much to his half-sister.

But she assured him that their stay would soon be at an end, as it would be time for them and Reuben to go again to sea.

"Very glad to hear it," the old fellow growled; "want them all to go away—all of them—every one."

Mrs. Harpy left him with her face livid with passion, and her half-brother, who caught the vicious look in her eyes as she went from the room, felt a strange misgiving creep to his heart.

"I wish Tom would come home," he muttered, as he went moodily about his house. "He's been a scamp—a scoundrel—a—but, hang him, I'd like to see his noble face once more."

The same wish was in Minnie's breast.

His mother, too, yearned for his return, and while the malignant plotters were scheming darkly against the three, Tom's coming was anxiously prayed for by those who were still his friends.

After Mrs. Harpy had left John Gregory she went to her room, where Captain Angel sat waiting.

"Is it time?" he asked, a cynical smile flitting over his bloodless features.

"His heart is still fixed on his favorite," Mrs. Harpy replied, spitefully; "he wishes Reuben away, and longs for the other's return."

"Ah!" captain Angel smiled again, the same cold smile; "his health is giving way—it is time for his friends to look after him."

"Yes, and after her as well—my half-sister; tell me, cannot you kidnap her, Captain Angel? Get her on board your ship, treat her vilely till she wishes for death. You understand what I mean?"

Mrs. Harpy's voice sank into a sharp whisper.

Her eyes blazed vindictively, and a slight color stole to her cheeks, as Captain Angel's glance met hers.

"Oh, yes," he replied, carelessly, "I understand, perfectly; I can do that—but upon one condition—can you guess?"

His voice was a deep, hoarse whisper, and the vindictive woman shivered, but said nothing.

The sinful woman stopped at nothing to secure her purpose.

Sanderson entered at this moment.

Like most men of his debased nature, he sus-

pected the woman who had given herself up to him.

Whatever thoughts Sanderson entertained, he kept them to himself, and the trio sat down to their future plans.

John Gregory was to be got to sign a will in favor of Reuben, and disinheriting Tom, at the same time leaving his solemn injunctions to Minnie to marry Reuben Harpy.

Sanderson chuckled over the prospect.

His avaricious nature yearned for the rich estates, over which he longed to have control.

Besides, he entertained sinister intents towards Minnie—intents which, as yet, he concealed within his breast.

"It will be a difficult task to get the old curmudgeon to sign," Captain Angel said. "His is a tough nature, but I think I know of a way to insure his compliance."

To look in his fairish face as he spoke these words, no one would have suspected the diabolical design lurking under his smooth aspect.

He smiled cynically when Minnie was spoken of as Reuben's bride.

"There is only one chance of our plan being knocked on the head," he observed, with his cold, quiet laugh; "it would be all over with our hopes if this Tom Drake should return."

Sanderson started to his feet.

"Curse him!" he cried, fiercely; "should he return I would strangle him!"

His cynical smile played about Captain Angel's lips, but he said nothing, and Sanderson walked restlessly up and down the room.

CHAPTER VII.

A DARK vision had disturbed his mind—the vision of our gallant hero, speeding across the seas, and putting foot on shore in time to hurl him to the earth, foiled and vanquished.

Captain Angel left soon after.

The next day a peculiar circumstance was reported.

Mrs. Drake had disappeared from John Gregory's house.

No one knew why she had fled, or whither.

None had seen the previous night a prone, muffled, senseless form, in the rude grasp of four brutal ruffians, who, under the direction of Captain Angel, got their victim down to the bay.

No one saw the vindictive visage of Mrs. Harpy as she watched from her concealment the abduction of Tom's mother.

This new incident disturbed John Gregory's mind.

At an early hour he wished Minnie good-night, and retired to his chamber.

It was one of these old-fashioned, solidly-built apartments, with thick doors and walls, and high, massive windows.

Once shut in there, with the heavy shutters closed, no more sound entered from the outside than from a tomb.

John Gregory shut himself in, and crawled to his easy chair by the fireside.

A small table was placed within his reach, with a tumbler of hot grog upon it.

It remained untasted and getting cold. John Gregory was deep in thought. A strange, mystic foreboding was at his heart.

It seemed as if that hour was to bring about his doom.

"If the boy would only come back," he mused, "I should feel safer. I am not safe now. No, I can feel my danger, and I cannot help myself."

The old gentleman buried his face in his hands and mused bitterly.

He started up suddenly as if a serpent had stung him.

His name had been pronounced in an icy, creeping whisper that crept through his veins, freezing his heart's blood.

Some one was in the room with him.

"My God!" he exclaimed, his features bathed in sweat, "who is here?"

"A friendly visitor!" a quiet voice exclaimed, and John Gregory's gaze rested on the bloodless visage of Captain Angel.

He had crept into the room unheard—the door was closed behind him—closed and fastened, as old Gregory instinctively felt.

His features were set to a forced calmness, but the subtle look of a hidden devil peered from his hard blue eyes.

When old Gregory saw him he made a quick movement as if to seize the bell-rope and summon help, but Captain Angel stepped before him and cut it above his reach.

"You need not trouble yourself," he said; "I desire a few minutes' conversation with you."

"Not here—not now," John Gregory said, trembling violently, as the lynx-eyes of the captain fascinated him.

"Here—and now," Captain Angel replied; "sit down and listen."

He forced John Gregory into his chair, and seated himself at the table.

"I have here," he began, taking a bundle of papers from his pocket, "certain documents which I require you to sign; we have pen and ink here. You have only to affix your name; I and my witnesses will do the rest."

"I sign no documents. What mean you? What papers are these?"

"One is your will, bequeathing the whole of your property to Reuben Harpy, and disinheriting your nephew, Tom Drake. The other is a paper rendering up to Lieutenant Sanderson the guardianship of your ward, Minnie Atherton, and enjoining her to bestow herself and property upon the aforesaid Reuben."

Captain Angel's tones were coldly deliberate.

He spread the paper before him as he spoke, and then, with a slight touch of his hand, pushed back John Gregory, who was rising in alarm in his chair.

"Scoundrel! Villain!" John Gregory cried, "leave me before my cries summon help!"

"Your cries will not be heard—sign."

"Never! I will not lend myself to this base plot. God help me! I see through it all now—all—"

He fell back shaking in his chair.

"John Gregory, sign."

The tones were murderously calm.

"Never—so God help me! No—not even if you murder me."

"We shall not murder you; a dead man could not do our bidding. These papers, John Gregory, shall be signed by you. Sign freely, or we will find fearful means to compel you."

"Help—help! murder!" John Gregory cried, springing from his chair.

Captain Angel thrust both of his clenched hands on his throat and hurled him back. Then he stepped quietly to the door, which he unfastened and opened.

"Enter," he said, softly; "he needs your persuasion."

John Gregory was rising again, breathless, when Sanderson and Mrs. Harpy glided in.

They had not brought Reuben with them.

They were afraid his cowardly nerves would be unstrung by the sight.

Mrs. Harpy stepped softly up to her half-brother, who shrank from her as if she were a serpent ready to coil its loathsome folds about his body.

Sanderson fastened the door, and Captain Angel approached on tip-toe to his victim.

"My dear Gregory," Mrs. Harpy said, "you must sign these papers."

"Not if you murder me," repeated Gregory, in a hoarse whisper.

"We are losing time," Captain Angel exclaimed, and flung his arms around John Gregory.

The helpless old gentleman struggled to get free; but Mrs. Harpy treacherously held back his head, and kept one hand over his mouth to stifle his cries.

Sanderson assisted in the devilish work; and, among them, they got their victim to the ground and secured him.

They had gagged him effectually.

Only his hoarse whispers of agony could be heard.

He thought they were going to murder him.

Captain Angel had a more terrible intention; he removed John Gregory's boots and socks, and sitting down quietly in front of him, coolly began his horrible process of tickling the old man's feet with feathers.

At first John Gregory writhed and shivered; but as the merciless torture proceeded, the reeking sweat rolled down his features, which were drawn up in frightful convulsions.

His eyes rolled wildly.

Foam gathered about his lips.

At a gesture from Captain Angel, Sanderson forced the pen into his hand.

But, despite the agony he endured, the stout-hearted old fellow seized the pen between his fingers and snapped it into fragments.

Captain Angel laughed his cold-blooded laugh, and resumed his infernal work.

Hardened as Sanderson and Mrs. Harpy were, they could scarcely endure the awful spectacle.

Had quick murder been done they might have borne it better.

But this unnerved them.

The guilty woman turned away from John Gregory's eyes, which rolled upon her as they started from their sockets.

Every muscle of his broad chest—every fiber of his body worked up and down in horrible contortions.

And still Captain Angel went on with his horrible work—went on till a wild cry of anguish came from the victim's muffled lips, and his head rolled helplessly back.

"Sign," Captain Angel cried.

Old Gregory made no reply.

He had fainted.

Blood and foam frothed about his mouth.

His whole frame quivered with a deathly tremor.

The very muscles of his body seemed rolling about under his skin.

Hitherto their infernal work had been carried on in silence, but now Mrs. Harpy drew back as white as a sheet.

"I cannot witness more of this," she said, shaking from head to foot.

Even the callous Sanderson was sickened at the sight.

Captain Angel's well-defined lips curled in a disdainful smile.

"Faugh!" he exclaimed, "your nerves are as weak as a child's; take some of this, then help me get some down his throat. We must not lose him yet."

Mrs. Harpy drank eagerly of the strong brandy, a flask of which he handed to her; then they poured some down John Gregory's throat, and brought him back to consciousness.

He gazed piteously upon them.

But Captain Angel replied by offering him a pen.

He refused to become the instrument of their villainy, and Captain Angel began anew his horrible task.

Human nature could endure no more.

The cruel device prevailed, and at last they got him to consent, and guided his shaking hand over the paper.

Even then he would not have yielded, but that he resolved to undo on the morrow the work of this night.

He had not calculated on the brutality of his pitiless tormentors.

While he lay gasping and still convulsed, Captain Angel, with a demoniacal glitter in his cold eyes, again picked up the feather instruments of torture.

Unable to speak, John Gregory's agonized face spoke his horror of this new barbarity.

Captain Angel answered him by a careless, mocking laugh, as he sat grimly down again to his fiendish work.

"Did you think we should let you off after this, you old fool?" he asked, cynically. "No, John Gregory, we are not going to kill you, because that is clumsy work; in fifteen minutes you will be mad—stark, raving mad. Ah! I thought that would make you writhe; a few more such touches, and then—"

The fifteen minutes had passed, the hellish deed was done; the guilty woman and her guiltier paramour, with ghastly looks, were bending over the prone, babbling man who lay at their feet, bathed in reeking sweat, and clenching his convulsed hands in his palpitating flesh.

They had replaced his boots and unloosened his hands—he was too exhausted to do any injury yet, and now Captain Angel glided to the door.

"It is done," he exclaimed. "Do your part now."

Noiselessly he descended the stairs.

Not a pang of remorse was there in his hard, cruel breast for the merciless deed he had done.

He and Sanderson were hiding in the shrubbery, when a succession of ringing shrieks from Mrs. Harpy aroused the house and brought the domestics to the chamber of old Gregory.

There they found their master with foaming lips and staring eyes—a raving madman.

They kept Minnie out of the way till he was secured, and the physician was sent for and informed of the sudden calamity.

The pitiless conspirators had done their work cleverly; in one of old Gregory's clenched hands was found the proclamation offering a reward for Tom's capture.

Even the physician was deceived, and the belief went forth that the misconduct of his favorite nephew had turned the old gentleman's brain.

For a day or two he was cared for in the old house.

But after that he was carried off to a lunatic asylum.

Deprived of her last protector, and under such appalling circumstances, Minnie felt more lonely than before.

The papers relating to her disposal were read to her, and Mrs. Harpy put on a semblance of kindness towards the orphan girl.

Reuben persecuted her with his unwelcome attentions.

The three plotters now took up their abode in Gregory's house, where they had it all their own way.

Mrs. Harpy set creatures of her own to watch Minnie, and the young girl found herself helpless in their hands and powerless to withstand their wishes.

The only point she would not yield in was in

consenting to be untrue to Tom and become Reuben's bride.

She had vowed to be faithful to her lover, and she resolved to prove herself so, though every device was tried to make her accede to what was represented as John Gregory's wish.

She was still so young that she might have been allowed a few months' more liberty if her prosecutors had not been hurried in their work by a letter which was brought by a foreign ship.

It was boldly addressed, and Sanderson, who intercepted it, felt slightly uncomfortable when he found it was from the high-spirited boy, whom he greatly feared.

Tom had sent the letter to his girlish love, and this was what the evil plotters read:

"DEAREST MINNIE:—Have you forgotten me, or thought me untrue? I will come home soon, and you shall hear my defense. If you do not reject me, then I will bear you away in my beautiful ship as my bride. TOM."

For one week after they had received this letter—which was destroyed as soon as read—every means was tried to overcome Minnie's constancy.

Cruelly treated by Mrs. Harpy, confined day by day in her chamber, the friendless girl knew not where to look for help.

Her only consolation was to gaze from her window to the distant sea, and watch for a coming sail which might prove to be Tom's ship, for the brave little maiden would not believe he had deserted her.

But no welcome sail hove in sight; and her persecutors finding threats and entreaties alike useless, resolved to effect her espousal by force.

They gave her no chance of refusal, and a clergyman was bribed to perform the nuptials; and on the appointed day Mrs. Harpy had her attired as a bride, and carried, more dead than alive, to the carriage which was to convey her to the place where the marriage service was to be performed—a little, lonely chapel, within sound of the beating waves by the seashore.

Reuben Harpy gazed in malignant triumph upon the fair young creature as she was led half-fainting into the sacred edifice.

He had no love for her—his base nature was incapable of so pure a feeling, but she had despised him, and he longed for revenge, yearned to have her in his power that he might gratify his evil passions on her weakness, and make her repent in bitter sorrow for having preferred Tom to him.

When the hapless girl was led into the chapel, her agonized glance wandered from face to face in search of some one who would aid her.

There was no pity on the vindictive countenance of Mrs. Harpy, and the ill-visaged Sanderson gloated over the spectacle of her misery.

As for Captain Angel, his hardened stare of sinister cruelty was worse than the malignant triumph of Reuben.

Her gaze at length rested on the clergyman, and forgetting that he was the hired instrument of their will, she fell on her knees before him, and besought him to save her.

"Help me!" she exclaimed. "I am forced to this hasty union."

"Be calm, child," the minister said. "The union is for your good. You will think less unkindly of it by-and-by."

With tears streaming down her fair cheeks, Minnie drew back from the man that disgraced his holy calling.

"Are you God's minister," she cried, "and suffer this cruel wrong? Oh, help—help—help—mercy! Is there no one to succor me?"

"To the devil with her cries!" Captain Angel exclaimed, as he pushed her violently from the door, which he closed and fastened.

"Hasten the ceremony. We shall have meddling witnesses here if her screeching continues. Stifle her screams, and drag her to the altar; and you, sir, quick with your mumbling."

Reuben caught the shrieking maiden as she tried to flee to the window and escape that way.

Roughly forcing her to her knees on the cold marble of the chancel, he dragged her towards the altar.

His mother and Sanderson assisted.

But even their efforts failed to keep her from shrieking for help.

Captain Angel, who, like the rest, was armed with his dress sword, had a hard matter to keep the keen blade in its scabbard.

More than once he clutched the hilt as if about to draw the weapon and plunge it into her body.

Reuben forced the weeping girl to kneel before the altar, and gagged her mouth while the ceremony began.

The first part was briefly hurried over—Minnie Atherton shivering from head to foot—but when it came to the question whether she would have him for her wedded husband, she shrieked a wild,

defiant "no," and springing to her feet fled from Reuben's grasp.

Captain Angel seized her by her hair as she flitted down the chancel.

"Take her, fool," he said to Reuben; "and hold her more securely."

"I will not be his victim!" Minnie cried. "Help—help! Will no one help a poor girl? Help, oh, help!"

Captain Angel stole swiftly up to her.

"Quiet, screech-owl!" he exclaimed, dealing her a violent blow on her fair throat that for the moment stupefied her.

Reuben took advantage of this to seize her again.

"Mine—mine!" he whispered, as the service went on.

But the words were never finished; with a wild shriek, more of joy than terror, Minnie leaped from his side.

"He comes!" she cried; "I hear his steps. I feel his breath in the air! I am saved! saved! Help! I am here!"

"Minnie—Minnie!" it was a manly voice that answered her, "who dares to harm you? Open the doors here, or by Heavens this sacred edifice shall be battered down—open, I say, or one stone shall not be left standing upon another."

There was a crash at the door as he spoke, then it was burst open, and a tall, finely-formed youth, enveloped in a long black cloak, and with his features concealed by a naval hat, sprang into the chapel.

He cast one glance at the group before the altar.

The trembling and debased clergyman in his white robes, the bride with the torn orange blossoms in her disordered hair, and three armed men standing in his path, with their hands on the hilts of their swords.

One glance he gave them, and with the bound of a young lion he dashed up the aisle, and hurling the three men aside, flung one arm around Minnie, and lifted her tenderly from the floor.

"Who dares to harm her now?" he cried, loftily, his eyes ablaze with passion, his tones thrilling with their impetuous rage, as the weeping girl, with a glad cry, clung trustingly to his breast. "Uplift a finger, the bravest of you, stand a moment in my path, and this sword shall travel to the hilt in your blood. Look up, dear girl, a living host, armed to the teeth, dare not harm you now."

Captain Angel took a step forward, and at this signal the three swords were plucked from their sheaths.

The fact of the interrupter of the wedding being alone, gave Reuben courage to advance.

"Stand back!" he cried; "she is my bride; I yield her to no man. Release her or you are a corpse."

"Release her!" the stranger's eyes flashed with a terrible light. "Release her! and to you! Move but one inch and I'll split you where you stand; take but one step and you step into your grave. I am here with an arm mightier than a thousand such as yours to save my bride."

Beating down Reuben's weapon as if it had been a reed, he threw aside his cloak and hat, and in his handsome uniform, with the glittering stars on his breast, revealed the gallant figure and noble features of Captain Tom Drake.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN ANGEL PUTS HIMSELF IN OUR HERO'S WAY, AND GETS MARKED FOR HIS PAINS.

THEY fell back a pace as his unquailing eye swept from face to face—none dared uplift a weapon against him—none dared to meet the fierce challenge of the dauntless boy, and, though only one opposed to three, his defiant bearing kept them cowering at bay.

He looked very noble as he stood with one arm supporting Minnie as she lay upon his breast, the other extended as he held his sword a-tilt, ready to pierce the heart of the first who moved.

He was somewhat altered since they had last seen him.

Exposure to the sea-air and scorching sun had browned his noble features, which were stamped with the dauntless, devil-may-care expression of his rover's life.

His frame had grown more stalwart, his chest had expanded, his limbs were more finely developed, and though his figure was graceful as ever, it was more indicative of his lion-like strength.

At the present moment his hot young blood mounting to his temples had crimsoned his countenance—and an angry light was leaping from his peerless brown eyes, and with his fine form set off by his rich uniform, he looked to the full the daring boy whose exploits had already made his name famous throughout the world.

Mrs. Harpy was the first to arouse them from their stupor.

"Are you all chicken-hearted!" she exclaimed. "Are you all afraid of a boy? Oh, that I were a man, that I might pluck his heart out. Pick up your sword, Reuben, and try if your coward arm can strike a blow for your wife and her rich lands."

Tom's glance swept proudly around.

"It was for that, then, this infamy was begun—to get her lands away. I am here only in time."

"In time to fall to the earth a corpse," Sanderson shouted, hoarsely, "unless you release that girl. Devil's brat! I thought I had seen the last of you."

"Not yet, ruffian; we have an account to settle first," Tom replied, setting his teeth firmly as he saw the three preparing to attack him.

Hitherto the minister had remained passive.

Tom's violent entry was so startling, that, fearful for his life, he had slunk behind the altar.

But now he came forward, hoping to interfere and save bloodshed.

"Young sir," he drawled, "let there be no bloody work done here. Remember, ere you raise your impious hand, this is the house of God."

"The house of God!"

Tom's voice quivered huskily.

"And yet this deed was to be committed under its roof—this unholy bartering of this dear girl."

"She was willing, sir."

"Liar!" thundered Tom. "Minnie, darling, you hear him? He would have me believe you had broken all your vows to me, and consented to wed yourself to this vile thing."

He raised his hands toward Reuben, who shrank from his angry gesture.

Minnie looked into his excited face.

"I never proved faithless to you," she murmured, through her tears. "They dressed me in these hateful robes and dragged me here. Oh, Tom—dear Tom, they have cruelly used me."

"I know they have, dear dove. Don't weep and tremble now; rest securely on my breast. They must be of better mettle than these kites to tear you from me now."

"We will see that, braggart!" Sanderson cried, as he made a cowardly thrust at Tom's unguarded breast.

Minnie screamed when she saw her lover's danger; but Tom, with a reassuring word, bade her not fear.

He seemed to hold very lightly the peril he was in.

Swiftly parrying Sanderson's dastard thrust, he pricked him in the shoulder, and dashed at Reuben, who, with Captain Angel, now confronted him.

With a wrist of steel he forced down their weapons, striking Reuben's from his nerveless grasp, and dealing him a fearful blow with the flat of his sword across the forehead, bringing him to the ground stunned and bleeding.

"Now," he cried, "who stands in my way?"

Sanderson crawled out of the reach of his trusty sword; but Captain Angel, stealing behind him, made a murderous plunge at Minnie's side.

If Tom had not seen the treacherous movement, Minnie would have been transfixed to the heart.

As it was, the thin blade passed so close to her breast that she shrieked convulsively.

Captain Angel had no time to make a second thrust.

With a furious onset Tom battered down his sword.

His rage was terrible at the base attempt on Minnie's life.

"Pirate!" he cried, "had you but grazed her fair skin, this weapon's point should have been driven into your brain. I will not slay you now; we have to meet again; but I leave you my mark, that I may know you when next we meet."

Twice, with swift force, he slashed at Captain Angel's cheek, cutting a fearful gash on each side; and as his treacherous opponent fell back, blinded with his own blood, he transfixed him through the neck and held him up by his red blade.

"I have not touched a vital part," he exclaimed, as he held the writhing wretch in this agonized posture. "You will live, but these wounds will be like a canker in your breast till we meet again."

He withdrew the weapon sharply, and Captain Angel, with a horrible groan of agony, fell to the marble floor.

This swift bloodshed had paralyzed Mrs. Harpy.

She had expected to see Minnie torn from Tom's arms, and our hero stretched bleeding at the altar steps.

And now the whole of his assailants had fallen beneath his prowess, while he stood unharmed, and with no one to oppose his departure.

She had only sufficient strength to fall beside

her son, and lift his guilty head from the chapel floor, as Captain Tom sheathed his red sword, and flinging open the door, passed out with Minnie on his arm.

A moment after she heard the roll of wheels, and knew that he had escaped.

Escaped with Minnie.

There was an end, then, to all their schemes, to say nothing of what they had to dread should he discover what they had been guilty of with regard to his mother and John Gregory.

The wicked woman's tongue clove to the roof of her parched mouth.

She had seen enough of his hot nature to show that their lives would not be safe for a moment should he learn their infamous secret.

He would be certain to make inquiries, and his penetration would lead him to suspect some deadly wrong, and then the terrible consequences of their crimes would overtake them.

There was only one chance—to have him taken.

A reward was offered for his capture, and once taken, he would be speedily tried and shot.

"Quick!" she cried; "we have no time to lose. We must act instantly or we are destroyed. A thousand pounds are offered for his capture. Let us have him taken in his first hour of triumph, before he finds out what we have done."

"Ay," Sanderson replied, "once have him taken, we are safe. Stay here until I send assistance—you, Reuben, come with me; the officers must be set on his track before another hour."

Tom's opportune arrival may be quickly explained.

After eluding the frigate, he made a rapid run to Penobscot bay, on the coast of Maine, thus being under the protection of the American flag; he then traveled overland to the vicinity of his old home.

He had brought the faithful Jerry Mizzen with him, and having disguised himself, was making his way towards John Gregory's house in entire ignorance of what had occurred during his absence, when the redoubtable Jerry, ever on the alert, perceived the carriage stop at the little chapel, and the helpless girl lifted out.

With no conception that she was Tom's plighted bride, he called his young leader's attention to it, and proposed that they should rescue the lady, whoever she might be, as she was evidently being forced to an unwelcome marriage.

The dauntless boy was as ready as his faithful follower to hasten to the lady's deliverance.

He had no suspicion that it was Minnie until he was almost at the chapel, when he recognized her voice screaming for help.

It did not take him long to force his way in, and Jerry was utterly at a loss to account for his sudden movements, he disappeared so quickly.

He tried to follow him, but was only in time to receive a tremendous blow on his head from the heavy door, as it swung back and knocked him out of the church.

As soon as he could recover himself, Jerry looked around and saw the driver of the coach in which Minnie had been conveyed, grinning at him, and significantly rubbing his head—two open results which added to the force of the blow—already raising a big bump on his head—were not to be borne.

So he turned quickly on the offending coachman.

"What are you grinning at, you infernal land-lubber?" he cried; "d'ye want me to pull that wig off your chump?"

"You'd better go inside and help your master," the coachman rejoined; "he'll find it hot enough among them officer chaps."

"Not he, you thick-headed swab; why, he'd eat a dozen or two of them before breakfast, and pickle 'em in the bargain, that's what he'd do, you holler-faced mummy. Come down off that perch, will you, or see how soon I'll put you off."

"What?"

The coachman put one finger delicately to the side of his nose.

This was a good deal more than Jerry Mizzen could stand.

Clambering up the side of the carriage like a cat, he collared the coachman by the nape of the neck, and swung him off his seat, giving him a kick to help him to the ground.

"Make a sight at me," he cried, pummeling the coachman till he bawled for mercy. "I'll teach you manners, you long-nosed shark. Belay, there, make a clean run for it, or I'll thump you to a jelly!"

The coachman was not valorous enough to strike, even in self-defense.

He had already lost his wig, hat and coat, and leaving them in the hands of the exasperated

Jerry, he scrambled to his feet and ran nimbly out of sight.

"Curse him, I'll trundle the skunk," Jerry muttered, as he vented his rage on that hat and wig; "a pretty swab to wear these things and talk to a man."

Jerry paused suddenly in his work of battering in the cocked hat.

It had all at once occurred to him that his young chieftain, after rescuing the lady, would be glad of a conveyance to put her in.

Full of this bright idea, he stuffed his sailor's hat inside the coach, and putting on the wig, hat and cloak, mounted to the box and took the whip and the reins which had been dropped in his fright by the coachman.

"Shiver me if I sha'n't make as good a Jarvey as any of them 'longshore lubbers,'" Jerry muttered, as he gazed complacently around: "Now, then, my brave skipper, as soon as you like to bring that gal along we'll start."

He never once doubted that Tom would succeed, nor did he think it worth while to go in and help him.

He had seen Tom victorious in too many sharp encounters to have any fear for him when opposed to any number less than a dozen or so.

A few minutes only had elapsed when the chapel door was flung open, and Tom Drake appeared with Minnie on his arm.

His sword was only half way in its sheath, and Jerry could see that it was steeped in blood.

"Ah!" he soliloquized, "I thought he'd get up to summat of that sort; he's as good as a doctor for drawing blood; a word, then a puff, whip goes his sword through your blessed carcass. It's a pleasure to serve under the flag of such a skipper."

Tom came quickly out and looked around for his sailor friend.

He did not recognize him in his disguise.

Jerry chuckled when he saw his mystified look.

"He don't recognize his own man," he muttered, gleefully.

Our hero, prompt in action, stepped with Minnie to the coach, and had opened the door sharply, when Jerry sang out:

"Avast, there, skipper; I'll be down the blessed gangway in a minit and hold the door for you to help the dear lady in."

Tom looked up in surprise at the metamorphosis of his faithful attendant.

"You there?" he said.

"Ay—ay, sir; here I is, perched up aloft like a little cherub. I thought you'd be wanting to get the lady away, so I tumbled the lubber off like an alligator, and here I is, ready to drive you where you like."

"Quick, then!" Tom said, when he had handed Minnie in. "Drive to the—no, to the coast; we must place this lady in safety before I seek my uncle and my mother."

"Ay—ay, sir," Jerry answered, as he whipped his horses into a smart gallop; "an' shiver me if I don't think we'd better sheer off while there's time, or there'll be such a hullabaloo that we sha'n't be able to hear the tune of our own blessed voices."

Seated in the carriage with his arm around Minnie, her face upturned to his, her gentle bosom throbbing against his breast, Tom felt that hour the happiest one in his life.

They had many things to relate to each other, and our hero's cheeks burned when he heard how Minnie had been ill-treated.

He betrayed no surprise when he heard that she had not received his letter, though he could not restrain his pleasure at the proofs she gave of her faithful confidence.

His heart reproached him when he thought of his weakness with the Corsair girl; still, even with her, his affection for Minnie had not faltered; it was still as deep and as true—ay, and as pure, for he could not have sullied the fair young creature beside him even by thought.

During the brief time since they had left the chapel he had made up his mind what to do respecting her.

He would not keep her on board his own ship, lest in future years any one should say words which would bring a blush to her cheek.

He resolved to hurry with her to England, where she had friends, and leave her in charge of a distant relative—Lady Castlemaine.

"For one year," he said, when Minnie seemed loath to let him leave her. "I have a name to win and my fame to clear. Then I will return to demand you for my wife."

And Minnie, though in her heart she would have gladly followed his fortunes, felt that he was right, and that for the present it was better for her to remain with her distant friends in the country she had never known.

One year—at the expiration of which time he

would return loaded with honors and dignity, and claim her before the world.

Tom listened in alarm when Minnie informed him of his mother's disappearance, and of the dreadful calamity which had befallen his kind-hearted old uncle.

His face grew pale and stern, and with knit brows, he determined on fathoming these unwelcome mysteries.

The young pair were aroused by Jerry Mizzen, who, leaning over the seat, put his head near the window, and sang out:

"Skipper, ahoy!"

"Ay—ay!" Tom said, emphatically.

"There's been a crew of lubbers a bellowing like mad; and just now shiver my beams if I didn't rest my blessed top-lights on a pack of hossifers and sogers a-giving us chase!"

"Alas!" Minnie exclaimed, "they will take you."

"Will they, miss? Well, that's what I think they just won't do. Eh, sir?"

"Fear not, dear Minnie; I am well armed."

"Yes; but you might get hit."

Tom's face wore an heroic look.

"I should not regret death if I died defending you. But don't be afraid, I am not anxious to die. There is no danger to me in the pursuit of those rabble."

"Danger!" chimed in Jerry, "should say there wasn't, indeed, the pack of 'longshore lubbers'! Shall I drive faster, sir? Take the young lady out of hearing, you know."

"Right," Tom said.

And Jerry, who had been driving the horses at a smart rate before, now lashed them into a furious gallop.

Jerry was not the most accomplished driver.

He handled the whip as if it were a ramrod, and tugged at the reins as if he were hauling the ropes of a ship.

The spirited horses, unused to having their mouths sawed right and left, as well as being lashed into the bargain, began to get restive, and plunged right and left, jolting the heavy carriage from one side to the other.

Our hero bore the bumping for some time; but at last his patience got exhausted, and he put his head out of the window.

"What are you doing?" he cried.

"All right, sir; get there presently. There's a shoal on my lee I'm steering clear of."

The shoal on his lee was a post set up as a landmark, for Jerry had long since got off the beaten track, and was floundering about in the deep ruts alongside the road.

In his anxiety to escape the post he did not see an overthrown tree on the other side, nor was he aware of its being there till the fore-wheel came in violent contact, and brought him to grief.

He was flourishing the whip at the time, when his heart was jerked into his mouth by the sudden lift, and before he could do more than make a frantic clutch at the reins, he was shot clean over the horses' necks.

He was brought up with a heavy bump on the hard ground, while the carriage, being then on the verge of an incline, rolled over and fell up against an elevation on the other side.

The sudden shock extorted a little cry of pain from Minnie.

But Tom, cool and collected as ever, forced open the door, and assisted her out, seating her on the green sward, while he went to seek their unfortunate coachman.

He found that worthy seated amid the wreck.

He was rubbing his head in a confused way, as if not quite certain whether or not he had broken his neck.

Tom laid his hand sharply on his shoulder.

"How came this about?" he asked, angrily.

"That infernal sunken bit of timber!" Jerry said, ruefully, as he struggled out of the mire.

"The lady, sir—is she hurt?"

"Fortunately, she is not. It is an unlucky event, but it cannot be helped now. We must set to work putting it to rights."

Putting it to rights proved altogether a difficult matter.

The carriage-pole was splintered, and one of the wheels so wrenched that it was impossible to proceed.

Jerry's visage wore a rueful expression when this discovery was made.

"It's no go," he exclaimed; "we're aground, and them darned lubbers will be forereaching upon us afore we can get clear of the wreck."

This reflection, too, aroused Tom.

He had seen that the horses, after being removed from the broken carriage, were comparatively uninjured.

He remembered that Minnie, when a child, had been famous as a horse-rider.

For himself, he would have ridden, bareback, the wildest steed of the Tartar steppes.

But whether Minnie could ride without a saddle was another matter.

He put the question, and was joyfully answered by her willing assent.

"There is a house a few miles from here," he said to Jerry, when he had assisted Minnie on the back of one of the spirited animals; "Farmer Inglis used to dwell in it, a stanch old gentleman; we will make our way there, and you can follow for orders. I am not decided whether to return to the boat or not."

"Better wait another day, sir; them cut-throat revenues are sure to be on the lookout."

"Why should they suspect me?"

Jerry put his lips close to his young chieftain's ear.

"One thousand pounds reward, sir."

"True—and that renders every moment of my stay perilous. No matter. I will run the hazard for this night—follow us at your leisure. Now, Minnie, for our ride."

The horses cantered off, side by side, and were soon out of sight.

"And now," soliloquized Jerry, "I can take this confounded head-gearing tackle off."

He alluded to the hat and wig, which he threw contemptuously aside, and taking his hat from under the seat of his broken carriage, sauntered off after his dauntless chieftain.

All sounds of pursuit had died away, and Jerry, whose throat was becoming unpleasantly dry, thought that there would be no harm in making for a little inn near the coast, with which he had been well acquainted in his smuggling days, and refreshing himself after his luckless tumble in the mire.

He had to go a little out of his way to get to the place, but at last he had the satisfaction of seeing it in front of him.

It was the old-fashioned inn where Tom had seen the men of the press-gang, by whom he had afterwards been captured.

The "Blue Lobster," it was called, and was kept by a low, ill-bred villain, named Simon Gagg.

Jerry had been one of the most constant frequenters, and had been well acquainted with most of the rough characters who associated there.

In his days its customers had comprised a ruffianly crew of crimps, smugglers, and runaway seamen.

Under its dilapidated roof many a villainous scheme had been planned, and in its whitewashed parlor was the rendezvous of the officers and men of the press-gang.

Jerry did not enter without a qualm.

There was a good deal of uncertainty regarding the reception he might get.

None, however, seemed to recognize him.

The landlady, a tidy-looking little woman, whose pleasant face bore marks of coarse ill-usage, looked up as he crossed the threshold, but without appearing to recognize him.

A very old magpie in a wicker cage startled him by a familiar caw.

Jerry remembered the bird—it always had a habit of calling out, in a croaking tone, "Pie—pie!" when any one entered it did not like, and its warning note was often the means of indicating the arrival of any of the revenue officers, against whom it had a mortal instinct of dislike, and many of whom would have been glad of the chance of wringing its talkative throat.

The parlor door was partially open, and the discordant hum of men's voices came from the room.

Some one was bawling out a seafaring song, and the hubbub of approval, stamping of feet, and knocking of mugs and measures on the table indicated its termination.

CHAPTER IX.

A REVENUE OFFICER.

"You will be welcome inside," the landlady said, mistaking Jerry's hesitation; "it's only a pleasant party of our usual chaps."

Jerry thought he might as well hear a song for half an hour as stand at the bar and drink, so ordering a stiffish glass of grog, he pushed open the door and entered the room.

A dense cloud of smoke half hid the faces of the men seated drinking at the tables, but Jerry could see that they were of the usual stamp.

Simon Gagg, the landlord, was near the door.

He was a short, thick-set ruffian, with low, repulsive features and big, hairy hands.

He leered at Jerry from under his thick brows, and our wayfarer thought for the moment he was recognized.

If Simon knew him he did not betray his knowledge, and Jerry, bowing to the company, who greeted his entrance with a tumultuous welcome, tumbled into a seat in a more retired part of the room.

No sooner was his grog brought him than a tall, lumbering sailor, with a massive sun-browned countenance and heavy black beard, came up to him, and bringing his huge hand down on Jerry's shoulder with a force that nearly bent him double, and jerked the sip of grog out of his mouth, sang out:

"What cheer, messmate—where d'ye hail from? ain't seen any of them lubbers of officers?"

"No," Jerry replied, "I ain't."

"Sing us a song, my hearty, then—and be hanged to all the officers, I say!"

"Sing!" Jerry echoed; "why, there ain't no more music in my voice than in the turn of a capstan; let some other gentleman of the company give us a song—and I'll help in the chorus."

"I'll be hanged if you sha'n't sing, you 'long-shore lubber—heave to, or, by thunder, I'll sink you!"

"Let the lad alone," Simon Gagg exclaimed. "Don't you see he's just off a cruise, and ain't took his bearings of the company yet?"

"Off a cruise?" hiccupped Jerry's persecutor, "and can't tip us a stave? I'll be hanged if he sha'n't sing. Heave ahead, you stopper-faced crocodile!—heave ahoy there, you lubber! That's to clear your toplights for you."

He deliberately took up Jerry's glass and dashed the hot contents in his face.

There was a general roar of laughter, and shouts of applause went around the room; but before they had subsided, Jerry, half blinded and smarting from the effects, was on his feet and facing his big antagonist.

"I've stood your cheek, you elephant," he exclaimed, "but if I stand that, my name ain't Jerry Mizzen."

To the surprise of the whole company, he administered such a straight one from the shoulder between the eyes of his opponent, that the brawny giant went sprawling over a table, and came heavily to the floor.

Cries of "bravo!" rewarded this unlooked-for act, and Simon Gagg stepped up to Jerry as the big sailor tumbled to his feet.

"Glad to see you back, Jerry," he said; "we've heard of your cruise. Where's your ship—and how's your boy-skipper, Captain Tom Drake?"

A buzz went around the room as the landlord spoke, and most of those who had known Jerry before soon crowded around him, looking with eager curiosity on the face of one of the daring band of the Boy Privateer.

But the big sailor struck his fist violently on the table.

"Off your cruise, are you?" he said; "then your skipper ain't far off. There's a thousand pounds reward for him, an' blow me if I mayn't as well earn it as them revenue sharks that's sure to get wind of it."

Jerry Mizzen was plucky at heart.

He stood in front of the tall sailor and barred his way.

"You don't get out of here to sell my skipper," he said; "and if these will let you go, I won't."

"You—you swab! Who's to stop me?"

"We shall," Simon Gagg said. "We don't have any blood money brought here, Black Bill. It's enough for them revenue sharks to do that."

Black Bill would have made an attempt to pass, but catching Simon's significant look, he pretended to give in.

He knew that Simon had made up his mind to have a finger in the business, and wanted him to wait till the proper time.

"An' now," Simon exclaimed, "as we're glad to see you back again, Jerry, you shall drink a glass of grog at my expense."

"And one at mine," chimed in Black Bill; "tip us your fin, messmate, and don't mind if I've been a little free and easy."

Considering that his being "free and easy" had resulted in his getting a knock on the forehead that would have stunned a less hard-headed man, and as it was, had raised an unsightly bump between his discolored eyes, the concession on Jerry's part was not so great a matter.

He, however, bore no malice, and Black Bill, having drunk with him and sworn eternal friendship, staggered off to chat confidentially to Simon about their sinister intentions of betraying Tom.

They were arranging their plans in a low tone, when the magpie cried out:

"Pie—pie!"

"A king's officer!" Simon muttered.

The door was opened, and a revenue officer appeared.

He was well known for his frequent visits there, and as he never minded taking a pipe and a glass in their company, when his mission was not the arrest of any of their number, they did not so much mind him, though they took good care not to give him much opportunity of learning what they talked about.

He came in looking pleasant enough.

"Don't disturb yourselves," he said. "I've

just dropped in in a friendly way, just to have a glass and a pipe."

"You're always welcome, Sam Andrews," exclaimed Simon Gagg, who would willingly have twisted his neck.

"I know it—I know it. A health to you, lads. Merry sport and good hauls to you, and when it comes to the last, may you take the halter game-ly."

Having given utterance to this inspiring speech, he sat down at the same table with Jerry, who wished him at the devil.

He tried to get up a conversation with our adventurer, but Jerry met him with the shortest replies.

He began to regret having come into the place. It was a breach of duty, and he wished himself safe away again.

"Off a cruise?" Sam Andrews asked, presently.

"Go to the devil, and find out!" was Jerry's reply.

"Don't be uncivil, Jerry; we are old friends, you know."

Jerry started.

He had been in hopes that this cunning limb of the law, whom he had known before, and had often given the slip after a hard chase, would not remember him.

The discovery was not pleasant.

"I'm very glad to see you here again, Jerry," Sam Andrews went on, in a low, stealthy tone of voice, "because, you see, Jerry, we may make some money together; and money is what we all want, even if we've come off a rich cruise—eh, Jerry?"

Jerry gulped down his liquor and stared speechlessly at the other.

He began to think he had been there long enough.

The place was getting disagreeably hot.

He made an attempt to leave his seat, but Andrews quietly put him back.

"Don't go yet, Jerry; we must have a little chat after the long separation. Ah, Jerry, you gave us the slip nicely, after you'd stowed them thirteen sacks of brandy under our noses. It's a pity to see such a clever fellow swing; but you must—we've got enough against you to hang you, Jerry. You've been a long time wanted, but you've turned up at last."

"I wish I'd turned up in the middle of the Red Sea," thought Jerry. "What the devil did the skipper want to come here for at all? He might have been sure they'd try to nab us all."

Andrews, who had been watching Jerry's face with a satisfied leer, now placed his hand softly on his knee.

"Jerry," he said, quietly, "now you must buy your neck out of the noose. We don't want you to swing, but we want the thousand pounds."

Jerry got uncomfortably hot.

"Ah, Jerry," Andrews continued, "what a fool he was to poke his head in the net!"

This was precisely what Jerry thought, but he did not say so.

"You see, Jerry, he must be nabbed. We've got our fellows on the lookout all the way down the coast, so he can't get away; he ain't gone far off yet, so must be hid somewhere, and, Jerry, I'm going to follow you, with a few mates, wherever you go, till we find him."

"What!" Jerry cried. "Then I won't go anywhere."

"Hush! don't speak so loud, and don't be a fool, Jerry; he must be caught, and you may as well share with us. You needn't lead us there—we'll follow; and when we've nabbed him there'll be four hundred pounds out of the thousand for you, and a free pardon; and if you don't—" he placed his lips close to Jerry's ear, and whispered: "you'll be squared up with a rope around your neck, Jerry, before you're three days older."

Jerry listened with open mouth.

He was certainly in a fix.

He didn't fear death.

He could do his share in the hot conflict, when shot and shell were doing their deadly work, but to be hanged by the neck and have the life squeezed out of him was an exceedingly unpleasant mode of getting out of the world.

He looked into the hard face of Andrews, and saw that he had no chance of escaping him.

As if to further convince him on that point, Andrews remarked, quietly:

"There's six of my fellows outside—make up your mind, Jerry; I'll smoke this pipe out while you think."

Jerry cursed him for his cool effrontery, but he was in a quandary, and he pondered how best to get out of it, sipping his grog desperately, while Andrews whiffed quietly at his pipe.

When he had smoked it out, he knocked the ashes on the table, and swept them off with the palm of his hand, then looking at Jerry, he said:

"Well?"

"I can't!" Jerry exclaimed; "I can't do it."

Andrews arose.

"Very well; we must first place you in safe custody, then see after him. But mind, we're certain to take him."

"Stop," Jerry cried, looking around as if to see if any of those present would help him. "Sit down again."

"Ha! I thought you'd come around. It ain't pleasant, after all, to have a rope tied about your throttle."

"It's ag'in me to sell him," Jerry said, "but there's no help out of it."

"Not a bit; you act wisely, Jerry, in deciding to share with us."

"I don't want the money—I couldn't touch it—but I don't want to swing."

"No, it must be uncomfortable. I never heard no one say anything after it—but they always look as if they didn't like it."

"It hurts me to do it."

"Oh, that's all right; you only go quietly out, we'll follow you to the house, then you can show us which room he's in; we'll do the rest."

"Have you got arms?"

"Yes, Jerry, we've got pistols and swords, and we know how to use them."

"Because he's a desperate hand at cutting his enemies down; besides my life wouldn't be safe a moment if he thought I'd sold him; he'd wring my neck like a chicken's."

"No fear; you leave it to us—you'll be all right."

Jerry still offered objections, but Andrews decisively overruled them; and finding no other means open, he presently got up and left, the officer following immediately after.

In less than two minutes after they had gone, Simon Gagg and Black Bill sallied forth armed, and with a determined look on their ruffianly faces.

Andrews allowed Jerry to go on in advance of himself and party, but took care not to let him out of sight.

The redoubtable Jerry trudged ruefully along, as if overcome by the thoughts of what he had to do.

Once Andrews saw him wipe what he supposed was a tear from his eyes with his sleeve.

It was evident he took the matter sorely to heart.

Andrews had no sympathy with his compunction; he had made up his mind, not only to capture Tom, but to secure Jerry himself, as well.

As for all he had said about pardon and share of the reward, that was pure moonshine.

When Jerry had got to the house where he had been told by Tom to seek him, he paused, and allowed the officers to come up with him.

"I shall have to go in first," he said. "If they see you they'll shut us all out."

Andrews considered.

"Don't try to trick us."

"We'll go in all of a bunch if you think they'll let us."

"No, we'll stay here; we'll wait ten minutes, but mind, at the expiration of that time, if you don't return, we will force our way in."

"Ten minutes ain't no use. I want to tell him all I've heard, and get his orders, and that is how it'll have to be. He's sure to want to send me down with a message for them at the coast. I'll leave him writing that—come down and let you in—then you pops up-stairs—opens the door—he thinks it's me, so doesn't turn around—of course you nabs him before he can move hand or foot—and then you has him. But mind—quietly; if he hears you it will be all up."

"Hum—can't you contrive to place his sword out of reach?"

"I'll try; now you stand back so as not to be seen; in fifteen minutes I'll make it right."

"Only mind, we sha'n't wait longer."

Jerry nodded, and the officer drew back from the house, while Jerry knocked for admission and was let in.

After the door had closed, Andrews repented having let his man go off so incautiously.

He had no check now against him if he intended to prove treacherous; and it was not at all a pleasant idea to imagine a window suddenly opening and a shower of bullets whizzing about the heads of himself and his companions.

His only consolation was in the hope of Jerry being influenced by the bribe.

He judged men's natures by his own, and believed that, like him, they would barter honor and all else for a price.

To his great relief, at the lapse of the fifteen minutes the door creaked on its hinges, and the face and figure of Jerry appeared beckoning them in.

"Follow gently," Andrews said to his men, "and be prepared. Now," he continued, catching Jerry by the wrist, "is it all right?"

"All right—come on quietly."

"Lead on; but the least treachery, and I'll blow your brains out."

Jerry closed the door, and they were in almost total darkness.

Just light enough came in for them to see each other's creeping forms as they went on tiptoe up the stairs, Andrews holding Jerry's wrist with one hand, while the other presented the cold muzzle of a pistol to his ear.

"He's in his room up-stairs alone," Jerry whispered; "he's got his sword on—you must take him quick—if he hears you he's sure to run the first one through. I've put his chair so that his back's to the door. Knock twice before you go in—that's the signal—he'll think it's me."

They encountered none of the domestics on their way.

Lights were in several of the rooms they passed, and from one or two came the sound of voices.

"They'll have something to astonish them," Andrews thought, "when they see us here."

Jerry stopped at a door on the top of the third flight of stairs.

It was just ajar, and a faint light shone forth.

Holding Jerry's wrist with a grip of iron, and waving his men back as they pressed forward, Andrews stooped down and peeped through the key-hole.

A small lamp was burning in the room, its light enabling him to see all he wished.

There, at the table on which the light was burning, was the figure of the daring boy they came to capture.

There he sat, cocked hat and commander's coat and all, his dress sword in scabbard by his side, the gold lace of his uniform glittering in the dull glare of the lamp.

He was leaning forward as if in deep thought, his head resting on his hands, his elbows on the table; a better posture for non-resistance could not have been devised.

Andrews released Jerry's wrist, which till now he had gripped, and replaced the pistol in his vest.

His heart beat wildly at the prospect of his capture.

It was not alone the reward, large as it was, it was the glory of taking the boy privateer.

This inflated his breast, and his voice was thick with excitement as he, in a low tone, said:

"Now burst in with me—seize him before he moves—one of you take this other—bind him while we do our work. Now, in—aha! Captain Tom Drake, you are our prisoner!"

With a swift, noiseless push, he burst open the door.

At the same time one of his men, in obedience to his orders, made a clutch at Jerry.

Our worthy friend, however, was not in a mood to be trapped like that.

Sending out both of his awkward arms straight as an arrow, he sent the officer reeling with the blow, and kicking his feet from under him, by way of helping his descent, sent him tumbling down the stairs.

At the very same moment, Andrews and his men had sprung upon the sitting figure at the table.

Giving him no time to stir, he flung both his arms tightly around him, while his men fell upon their captive, putting pistols and sabers to his head.

"Our prisoner!" cried Andrews; "stir, and you die!"

"Aha!" laughed the voice of Jerry outside the door, "bind him fast—mind he don't burs from you—ha-ha!"

Andrews and his men started back—the figure they had so suddenly pounced upon fell over in their arms and dropped to the floor, and there lay, not the struggling figure of our daring hero—not the grand form of the dauntless boy whom they had thought to capture—but a capitally made up effigy stuffed with straw.

At the instant when the baffled officers made this unpleasant discovery, and were furiously gazing at one another, a voice, whose ringing, defiant tones made them quail, cried:

"Stand where you are—the first who stirs a finger or moves a foot dies a sudden and unseen death!"

A defiant laugh followed these words, and then the heavy door swung to, and closed with a metallic snap.

The entrapped officers stared at each other aghast.

They were prisoners.

Shut in that strong room with the windows securely barred from the outside, and the door fastened by a secret spring.

Shut in, foiled, and ensnared, and menaced by an unknown death.

CHAPTER X.

AN INTERESTING ADVENTURE.

THE ruffianly landlord of the "Blue Lobster," and his rascally confidant, Black Bill, having followed the officers to Farmer Inglis' house, hastened off to give information to the authorities, and to claim the reward for our hero's capture.

Simon Gagg was too well acquainted with the astute cunning of Jerry Mizzen to imagine he would allow the officers to fall unawares upon his young master: he had no doubt they were being led into a sure trap, from which they would not be permitted to escape till their intended prey was out of their reach.

His own stratagem was to lie in wait for Tom somewhere between Farmer Inglis' house and the beach, with a sufficient party to take him when he was unsuspecting of danger.

The authorities were eager to capture one whose daring deeds had already made him so notorious, and as quickly as possible an armed body of men, under the guidance of the rascally associates, made their way towards the place of ambush near the beach.

It fell out as they had surmised.

Tom was all ready for departure when his commanding tones appalled his would-be captors, whom he had so cleverly trapped; and while they were staring at each other in speechless dismay, he and Minnie, accompanied by the faithful Jerry Mizzen, left the farmer's hospitable shelter, and proceeded coastwards through the darkness of night.

Farmer Inglis would fain have persuaded our hero to remain till morning, but Tom did not deem a longer stay prudent.

For fear of pursuit they walked the whole way, leaving the horses to be found by the officers' party, when they succeeded in getting out.

Tom had dismissed all idea of further pursuit just now, and was joyously conversing with Minnie, while Jerry Mizzen trudged thoughtfully and silently behind them.

It was now the lightest hour of the night; the moon was up and shone upon the cold leaden waters of the distant bay, lighting up the tangled gorse and clumps of shrubs and trees through which our adventurers had to force their way.

The part they had reached was dense enough to have concealed twenty men.

As it was, half-a-dozen were lying in wait, almost at their feet, lying so well concealed that their presence was not even dreamed of till they started up all of a sudden in Tom's path and challenged him to surrender.

Half-a-dozen officers, well armed, their weapons pointed at our hero's breast; behind them were Black Bill and Simon Gagg, instantly recognized by Jerry Mizzen, who was so confounded by the unexpected vision that he could only stand still in dumb amazement.

Minnie Atherton uttered a faint cry.

Her quick gaze was turned from the threatening men to our hero's face.

He had not uttered a sound, but she could see his fine eyes flashing, and could feel how his daring breast swelled with rising anger.

Jerry was the first to speak.

"Well, my kiddies," he said, "what does yer honors want?"

"Captain Tom Drake," one of the officers replied, "we call upon you to surrender. Resistance is useless, therefore don't put us to the trouble of shooting you down."

Our hero's lips curled in scornful contempt; but in no other way did he deign to notice their challenge.

Simon Gagg and Black Bill, who had kept at a respectful distance, now urged the officers forward.

"Take him," they said, "and mind, it's our reward."

"Your reward is here, ruffians!" a voice cried hotly.

And from the shelter of the thick gorse arose the form of bold Ben Barnacle.

A dozen of Tom's crew were at his heels.

They had their drawn cutlasses in their hands and their pistols ready for use.

Jerry Mizzen no sooner saw this welcome help out of their difficulty, than he indulged in a hearty burst of laughter, and sidling up to the first of the officers, he coolly tweaked his official nose.

"There, you lubber!" he cried, "what d'ye think of that eh, you ugly son of a sneak? What about surrender now?"

Ben Barnacle's first act was to salute his youthful leader; his next, to turn and face Black Bill.

The swarthy ruffian's face grew ghastly as he met Ben Barnacle's eyes, his fierce eyes quailed, and his huge limbs trembled beneath him.

"We meet sooner than I expected, devil's spawn," Ben Barnacle hissed. "When we last parted I swore by the living God to mark you

when we met. You have asked for your reward—here is an earnest of what you will get."

With the full force of his herculean frame he dashed out his tremendous arm, and struck Black Bill a terrible blow between the temples.

It seemed to crush in the burly ruffian's skull.

He uttered a sudden cry, and dropped to the earth as if his brains had been beaten out by the kick of a horse.

Ben Barnacle cast one look of deadly hate on the prone form, then he faced Simon Gagg and the officers, who shrank respectfully out of his reach.

"I have been lying in wait as long as you have," he said. "I knew your purpose when I saw you led here by that cursed reptile. Did you think, fools, we should let our chieftain fall into your hands like that? Go, and be thankful for your lives. Let one of you remain after I count five, and we will show you what a dangerous game it is to meddle with the crew of Captain Tom."

He had no occasion to trouble himself with counting.

At the first number the whole body of officers took to their heels, and in less than a minute were out of sight.

Ben Barnacle rested his foot on the broad chest of Black Bill, who lay breathing heavily and incapable of movement.

At first he seemed about to trample the ruffian's life out.

But a second thought prevailed, and spurning him with his heel, he turned to our hero, who cordially held out his hand.

"Thanks, Ben," the brave boy said. "The fellows might have caused me some trouble, and, as you see, I have a lady here."

"We began to grow anxious," Ben replied, when he had doffed his cap to Minnie, "so we landed, and were making our way inward when we saw them lie in wait for you, and crept up without being seen. We were not afraid of your being taken," Ben added, an admiring look on his manly features; "but they're as troublesome as vipers, these land sharks, and it's best to draw their sting until we cross the border."

Once more he spurned Black Bill's body.

"Lie there, hound!" he cried. "The time will come when I will stretch you at my feet never to rise again."

"Yes, lie there," Jerry Mizzen chimed, dancing delightedly around the prostrate saint, "and wait till we send your mammy to put a smelling bottle up your ugly nose."

Black Bill staggered helplessly to his feet as soon as they were out of sight.

His coarse, repulsive features were set in ghastly hatred.

His bleared eyes were starting from their swollen sockets.

"Curse you!" he hissed, as he ground his teeth savagely; "you've put a mark here; but I'll be even with you yet, and then, Ben Barnacle, I'll have revenge for this."

He struck his clenched hand against the bump on his swollen forehead, and steadying his shaking frame, staggered after the officer and his cowardly confederate.

No further adventure interfered with our hero and his party.

They soon arrived at the bay, where a little schooner was waiting.

Tom's favorite middy, respectfully saluting our hero, said:

"There's been a revenue boat on the lookout, sir; and they made such a stir up at the fort just now that we were getting ready to come and rescue you. They're keeping a sharp lookout. Some one's betrayed you, sir, that's quite certain."

"Then let them do their best," Tom replied; "they'll not take us yet. Come, dearest Minnie, my ship lies in American waters. We shall be safely aboard soon, and your gentle fears will be at rest."

Jerry turned up the whites of his eyes, and lolled his tongue out in his cheek as he pictured the meeting of Zeila and Tom's bride.

"I always knowed him to be plucky," he soliloquized, "but he must have the audacity of the devil to cheek being on ship with them two women. Two women! if there ain't mutiny and a scrimmage aboard with 'em both afore we're many days at sea, why I'll marry the first woman I tumble across next time I'm on shore; if I don't, shiver me!"

A steady breeze and an even sea took the gallant little schooner out of the Bay of Fundy, which joins the waters of Penobscot, for the continuation of St. Johns', N. B., coast line is that of Maine.

Our gallant Tom had come here for a double purpose—the one that, next to Minnie, had taken deep root in his heart.

"My home has ever been on the great American continent. I am an American in sympathy,

feeling, and independence. I, for one, never asked for the protection of the mother country. She is not so near to us in all things dear to the people of the new world as America. I, for one, will let her see that I do not belong to England because I was born in the dominion.

"They shall suffer deeply for the wrong done to me. Thank Heaven, another rupture between her bigoted ruler and America will make my vessel a welcome acquisition to the U. S. slender navy!"

Thus, if destiny should throw him into the hands of the English, they would be compelled to treat him as a prisoner of war, and not, as his enemies would like, as a pirate.

Already had he communicated with the U. S. naval authorities, and only awaited his recognition and commission.

It was a proud moment when he stood on the deck of his beautiful ship once more, and he could not resist his impatience to get away even until he was fairly on her deck.

"Weigh anchor silently," was Tom's first order, as he mounted the ladder. "Not a sound till we are far out at sea."

Late as the hour was, Zeila, the corsair girl, had not yet retired to rest.

She had been anxiously awaiting his return, and ran lightly towards him when she heard his thrilling tones.

The glad light of joy went from her eyes when she saw Minnie leaning on his arm.

Her swift instinct told her that this was Tom's maiden love—the worshiped idol who alone had a place in his heart.

Yet there was more of sorrow than of passion in her looks, as she stood half trembling and pale, like the frail child of nature she was.

Captain Tom's voice startled her.

"Come hither, Zeila," he said.

And fleet as a young fawn the corsair girl ran to him.

"This is my boyhood's love," he continued. "I want you to welcome her, Zeila; Minnie, dearest, say a kind word to this eastern pearl; she has a strange history. You will sympathize with her when you hear it."

After she had quickly scanned Minnie's gentle face, and glanced from her to the handsome countenance of Captain Tom, an approving look beamed from her dazzling eyes, and with fairy-like gentleness led her down to the cabin.

"Well," muttered Jerry Mizzen, who had been an observant spectator of this meeting, "she's been and took to her like that! Well, if that don't bang all! Ah! they means mischief, though, I'll swear, or they're not two women. Two women! I'd as soon have two she-cats tied around my neck."

Busy hands had meanwhile got the sails aloft.

The anchor was noiselessly brought from the blue bed of the bay, and as the light breeze filled out her canvas, the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, swaying with a graceful motion on the surface of the waves, sped with her accustomed swiftness out to sea.

For hours after she had been conducted by Zeila to her cabin did Minnie lie in a dreamy kind of wakefulness, trying to realize the change in her destiny.

Less than twenty-four hours ago she was a captive in the power of her enemies, and doomed to a loathsome union.

Her lover's coming, and her swift deliverance, seemed more like a vision of enchantment than reality.

How grateful she felt for having been rescued from his base-minded cousin!

How joyous to be with him!

How much more joyous if she were his bride, sharing his adventurous career!

A little pang of regret shot through her heart as she thought of their speedy separation, and a little pang of jealousy when she thought of the corsair maiden, who would have the privilege—denied to her—of sharing his cruise.

But then she remembered how noble it was of him not to want her to stay with him till he had made himself respected and admired throughout the world.

Then she would be his bride, and no Zeila should stand between her and her hero lover.

Zeila had shown her utmost kindness and delicacy, yet there was something in the wild, gazelle-like eyes of the corsair maiden that made her almost fear her presence there.

With the quick perception of love she scented a danger our hero would never have dreamed of—the danger of such an impulsive nature as Zeila's, should she really love Tom, and have that love changed into jealous hate and revenge.

The cabin in which she lay was most luxuriously fitted—it was more like a fairy boudoir than anything else.

Rich silken curtains, gauze-like festoons of snowy whiteness, lace-like drapery, delicate as

an insect's wing, floated around her; beauteous and rare-scented flowers were heaped in magnificent vases, and a subtle, delicious perfume filled the air.

The couch on which she lay was almost too soft and buoyant even for repose—it yielded with every light movement, and arose again more buoyant than before.

The coverings were of the richest velvet, or silk, and the finest wool, and so many novelties of wonder met her gaze that daylight was faintly peeping into the apartment before our heroine's eyes, tired as they were, closed in slumber.

The sunbeams were shining through the gossamer curtains when she awoke.

Her first languid movement as she sat dreamily up, was to ring a little bell, and before its silvery tinkle had died away, Zella glided softly into the cabin.

She seemed to have constituted herself Minnie's attendant.

With playful grace she caressed her and then set about helping her with her toilet, arraying her with such taste that our heroine could not restrain a blush of pleasure when she caught sight of her own graceful figure in the many mirrors surrounding her.

Captain Tom greeted her proudly when Zella led her from the cabin.

He had been awaiting her for hours, and felt supremely happy as he assisted her to the quarter-deck.

A seat had been already placed for her, and, with a giddy sensation, Minnie gazed around.

They were far out at sea.

The ship's white sails were fluttering like the wings of a beauteous bird as she went on her silent way.

The decks were scrupulously cleaned, and every stitch of canvas was in its place.

The greater portion of the crew were grouped about the decks—a fine handsome set of fellows—boys and men richly attired, and with the daring brand of their bold career stamped on their sun-browned faces.

But what most charmed Minnie was the devoted and admiring faithfulness with which they regarded their princely boy commander, when he appeared like a demigod among them.

It gladdened her to see that he could count on the love and heroism of so many staunch hearts, for she knew the secret of his hazardous career, and was well aware what evil the treachery even of one amongst them might work.

Land was out of sight.

The sun was dancing merrily on the blue waters.

The sky was almost cloudless.

A dreamy rapture stole to Minnie's heart.

All seemed so peaceful and happy.

It was almost with pain she observed the shining guns of brass and iron ready to be run out at the open ports, and the neat piles of round shot at hand for deadly service.

A glance, too, at the diversity of weapons in the sashes of the daring boy-voyagers told her plainly, too, how warlike were their intents, should opportunity call them to action.

Our hero watched with strange interest the varying emotions depicted on her fair face.

"So you like my ship?" he ventured to observe at length.

"It is a noble vessel," Minnie replied, ardently; "and your crew seem so daring and handsome."

"They are of true metal—stanch to the death! As for this brave craft, we took her from the Barbary pirates. It was by slaying their fierce leader that I became, as it were, the protector of little Zella. She has clung to me ever since, and I do not like to send her away."

Tom said this half as an excuse. He did not know how she would regard his guardianship of Zella.

Minnie was, however, too guileless to be estranged on that account.

On the contrary, her interest in Zella increased, while she looked upon our hero with even more idolatry of admiration when she heard of his desperate bravery in vanquishing the corsair.

Minnie seemed so delighted with her life at sea that Tom ran his ship to the Canary Islands, and around the coast of Spain, giving her a delicious pleasure trip before he took her to the now hated England.

And during all this time Zella attended upon Minnie with the assiduous fidelity of the most devoted slave; her chief pleasure being to gratify her every wish, even before expressed, and to array her with such grace that she stood more enchanting in Tom's eyes.

The joyous voyage was over at last, and Minnie grew sad at the idea of their speedy separation.

Often, indeed, was our hero tempted to take advantage of her love, and induce her to become

his bride there and then, and remain with him forever.

But the true nobility of his nature triumphed, and he adhered to his intention of placing her for one year under the care of Lady Castlemaine.

Having altered the trim of his ship—a practice he always adopted when making for an English port—Tom sailed to Gravesend, Lady Castlemaine being then at her mansion at Purfleet.

He had assumed the uniform of a captain, and quitting his ship at noon on the day of his arrival took Minnie ashore, and no adventure befalling him on his way, announced himself to Minnie's relative.

She was a prim elderly dame.

She received Minnie coldly, and listened in silence to Tom's account of himself till he got as far as the carrying her from the church, when she interrupted him by saying:

"That was sacrilege; and however evil-intentioned your relatives may have been, there were other means of dealing with them without this unjustifiable outrage in God's house."

"I did not stop for justification," Tom said. "I rescued Minnie, and took her to my ship, and now I ask you to take charge of her till I return."

Lady Castlemaine inclined her head, and our hero, drawing Minnie to his breast, took an affectionate farewell of her.

"One year," he said, tenderly, as he toyed with her glorious hair, "then I will come back, and you shall be my bride."

Minnie could not answer him.

She kissed him through her tears.

Her young heart was stricken, and Tom half repented he had brought her, as he tore himself from her embrace, and hurried out of the house.

Lady Castlemaine said nothing to Minnie about her future that day; but the next, after she knew that the young girl had watched the sails of Tom's ship fade from sight, she called her to her boudoir and addressed her gravely.

"You must make up your mind to forget this foolish romance," she observed, quietly. "A more fitting destiny awaits you than a life with this unscrupulous adventurer—you must maintain a discreet silence, too, about the past. Were it known that you had allowed him to carry you off on board his ship, the doors of society would be closed against you."

Minnie raised her sorrowful glance in surprise. There was a world of meaning in the quiet, inflexible look of her relation; that look troubled the young girl's heart, and made her wish herself again on board our hero's noble vessel.

When Tom returned to his boat he was informed that a king's cutter had brought up alongside them, asking them a great many questions respecting the ship, her crew, and destination.

They were particularly anxious to know if she was commanded by a youthful captain.

"But I paid them out strong," Bob Hauler said: "I swore our skipper was at least seventy years old, and had gone ashore to give his great grandchild a birthday present, so they steered off then, the hulks; but hang me if I like the cut of their craft, and I make no doubt they'll be somewhere on our lee, trying to overhaul us."

Tom thought it would be very much like overhauling a tiger, but he said nothing.

Stepping on board when they reached the ship, he ordered the anchor to be weighed, and descended to his cabin.

Zeila crept in noiselessly as he sat moodily at the table, and placed her soft arms around his brow.

It was almost with relief that she had seen Minnie depart.

The high-minded girl was passionately fond of adventure, and feared that Tom would forget the calls of his exciting career if Minnie remained on board.

Tom did not repel her—her sympathizing presence soothed him, and almost unconsciously she he suffered her caresses.

In a little while Bob Hauler came to the cabin door, and respectfully saluting his boy-leader, inquired which way to steer the ship.

To Portsmouth," Tom said; "the British fleet is there. I have business with some of them. We will run among them, and afterwards hoist our own colors, and cruise for the pirates of the Mediterranean."

Bob Hauler saluted and withdrew, a grim look about his massive features.

Something seemed to please him in the idea of his youthful chieftain running the gauntlet of the British fleet.

Zeila clapped her hands with joy at the prospect of a more stirring life than they had been leading.

She longed, too, to be away from sight of England, whose cold cliffs were so un congenial to her ardent mind.

Perhaps, too, she thought that the further Tom

was from his lady-love the better would be her chance of engrossing his affections.

The news that they were about to start on an adventurous cruise ran like wildfire through the ship, and every daring heart was elate at the promise of a speedy encounter with some richly-laden Barbary cruiser.

The British fleet was at this time lying off Spithead awaiting orders to proceed to sea.

As usual, in time of war, every vessel upon arrival was subjected to a severe examination, and the spruce vessel of our boy-adventurers was certain of a strict overhauling.

As far as possible, alterations had been made in her rig, a coat of paint had aided her disguise, and no trace of her notorious name appeared on her bows. There was written there in gold letters:

The Saucy Sea-Dove.

Care had been taken, too, not to make too great display of her armament, while the boy-crew had laid aside their picturesque buccaneer costume, and were dressed in a fitting naval uniform.

Tom still wore his handsome dress as captain. There was one thing more, respecting which great care was exercised.

The immense quantity of riches they had on board was stowed out of sight.

As soon as they came in sight of the fleet they were signaled from the flag-ship, and full particulars demanded of them.

They were well prepared, and having eluded the vigilance of their questioners, were soon lying quietly in the roadstead.

The business which had brought him there was to make an offer of understaing certain hazardous missions against the French, with whose intended movements he had been made acquainted.

In pursuance of this he visited every admiral in the fleet, but his services were declined by one and all.

They were too jealous and greedy of fame to follow in the wake of Tom's stripling-crew.

Our hero was much nettled at this cool reception, and he inwardly determined to make them regret the slight.

Indeed, he did not strive to conceal his feelings, and completely astounded the last admiral—a prim, methodical old fellow—with whom he held conference, and whom he talked to, as Jerry Mizzen afterwards said, "like a Dutch uncle."

The redoubtable Jerry could scarcely repress his feelings as he helped to row his young leader ashore.

The idea of their lying under the very bows of a fleet of armed vessels, each one of which was under orders to take the saucy vessel, whenever they could lay hold of her, and clap irons on her desperate crew!

As for the brave boy-skipper, he scarcely gave the matter a moment's thought, but with the most consummate coolness trod the quarter-decks of the frigates, though he knew that the officers and admirals with whom he conversed had in their pockets the proclamation offering a thousand pounds for his capture.

Truth to say, the daring boy delighted in peril; it suited his nettlesome nature to walk amidst the most imminent danger.

As he had gleaned intelligence concerning his mother, which caused him to make inquiries among the shipping there, he was forced to stay some time in Portsmouth, so he thought he could do no better than improve the occasion by making friends of some of the authorities on shore.

CHAPTER XI.

A FORTUNATE EXPLOIT.

ONE evening an adventure befell him which was destined to bring him into the society he desired.

It was rather a dark night, and he was walking, cloaked and armed, towards the batteries on shore.

He was deep in thought, thinking of his mother, whom he yearned to discover—thinking of his kind old Uncle Gregory—thinking of Minnie, whose simple troth was so trustingly given to him—thinking of Zeila, whose love for him was growing deep as the passion of an Oriental mind could be.

Quick, heavy steps near him interrupted his reverie.

He heard a faint scream, evidently from a young girl's lips, answered by rude oaths and coarse menaces.

Then the angered tones of an old gentleman struck upon his ears.

"Slip your stern-sheets, or I'll send you to dock for repairs. Rob me, indeed, a commodore!"

"Come, old buffer, hand over all your valua-

bles, or we shall hurt you, and the lady, too," a rough voice answered.

"What, strike my colors to you, land-sharks? Come on, and look out, the first one that comes within arm's reach of me!"

Tom was near enough by this time to see the speaker a fine, stalwart old English gentleman, of unmistakable naval aspect.

He was wielding a heavily-knobbed stick, with which he kept at bay four ill-looking ruffians, whose purpose had been to waylay and plunder him in that lonely place.

The young girl, of about seventeen summers, clung to his side, too terrified to do more than gaze in speechless dismay on the coarse scoundrels.

Brave and determined as the gentleman undoubtedly was, he must have experienced some rough handling, and with his young charge, have been despoiled of his money and valuables, if our hero had not been near.

The place was lonely.

The few houses near gave shelter to a rapacious crew of evil-minded beings of both sexes, ready at any moment to resort to deeds of plunder and violence.

The ruffians did not for a moment anticipate any interruption, and were considerably astounded when our hero stalked into their midst, and with lion-like strength hurled two of them aside, and sent a third reeling with a blow from his clenched hand.

This sudden and daring attack staggered the villains, and they fled in terror.

The old gentleman warmly thanked his young preserver.

"Just in time, young sir, to do me a service. Many thanks—many thanks. The scoundrels, to attempt to rob me! I thank you, young sir, for ridding me of the impudent rascals! Hang me, sir, you managed them well—eh, Jenny? It was capital to see him send them to the right-about."

The young girl whom he addressed as Jenny had all this time kept her gaze on the symmetrical form of their youthful deliverer.

She blushed as the old gentleman spoke, and timidly joined in thanking our hero.

"In uniform, too," the old fellow exclaimed. "Glad of it; like to see the honor of the cloth upheld. Your hand, young sir. Dine with us this evening, and listen to an old sailor's yarns over as good a bottle of port as you'll sip in a cruise. Come, let's hear where you hail from, and what you're called. I'm Commodore Ellis, of his majesty's service. This is my niece—Jenny Ellis, my brother's child—as true-hearted a girl as ever had her cheeks kissed by the sun, though a little wayward. And now, sir, what may we have the pleasure of calling you?"

"I am called," our hero replied, "Captain Grey."

"Captain! Egad! and so young. Our navy, sir?"

"No, sir; I hold my commission from his majesty, the Emperor of the Brazils."

"Whew—humph!" the commodore whistled. Then, altering his tone, continued: "Ah, well, a brave man is the same, whether he holds his commission under another flag or no—unless it were the Frenchmen yonder. While I serve my king, never would I touch hand of theirs."

Tom smiled.

"I am with you there, sir," he exclaimed.

"Hurrah!" sang out the old commodore, grasping Tom by the hand; "there is the ring of the true metal. Jenny, my love, there's a hero for you; take his arm and bring him on to our house. Remember, he's our prisoner for to-night, and I give the captive to your keeping."

The fair-faced Jenny timidly let her glance fall as our hero, with quiet gallantry, gave her his arm, while the hearty old commodore walked on by Tom's side, conversing with much gusto upon the approaching battles with the Frenchmen, whom they were about to sweep from every sea.

When they had got away from that part of the town, the commodore's stentorian lungs brought a coach to take them up.

The old seaman growled out the address, and after fifteen minutes' jolting over the stones, the rickety vehicle brought up in front of a handsome residence standing in private grounds, and illuminated from attic to basement.

"Now, you lubber!" bawled the commodore, "open the door and be hanged to you! What the devil do you mean by keeping a king's officer waiting like this?"

He did not give the driver time to descend, but bundled out, and gave a tremendously noisy summons at the gate.

Tom handed Jenny gracefully out, and the pair walked leisurely up the graveled path while the commodore settled with the driver.

Our hero was surprised to see that preparations were made for a dinner on a large scale.

Numerous guests were already arrived, and the commodore, having started Jenny off with her maid, conducted Tom to his own room to prepare for the reception below.

As soon as the officious valet—whose attentions were testily dispensed with by Commodore Ellis—had left them, the commodore faced Tom suddenly, and leaning his back against the door said, abruptly:

"Now, young sir, you're alone with me in my private room, and hang me, I mean to speak my mind!"

Tom was somewhat surprised at this mode of address; the more so when the commodore brought his hand down heavily on his shoulder. He thought he was discovered, and a rather ludicrous look stole over his careless features.

"I know you, sir," continued the old gentleman.

"To be Captain Tom Drake," thought our hero. "I'm discovered, and have got into a fix."

To his relief, the commodore, however, said:

"I know you, sir, to be a noble and worthy youth—a hem!—officer and gentleman. I can trust you, and you shall be let into our family secrets—secrets, sir, that have stolen the blush from that young girl's cheek, and made her a prey to the most unhappy feelings. Yes, sir, you shall know all by and by."

Tom was a little mystified at this, but the old gentleman left him without another word, and said no more on the subject when he appeared a few minutes afterwards to conduct him to the reception-room.

It was a grand old saloon, brilliantly lighted and tastefully furnished. At the present moment it was crowded with guests, and the eyes of all were turned towards the handsome figure and fearless countenance of our hero as he entered with his noble friend.

He was attired in a rich uniform, and with his gold-hilted sword by his side, his bold chest expanded, with the glittering epaulets on his tall shoulders, the scarlet glow on his cheeks, and the defiant light in his fine eyes, he looked, indeed, the beau ideal of a dashing and gallant sailor.

Many a lovely bosom throbbed as he passed gracefully by—many a bright eye flashed its bewitching glance upon him.

Even the guests, who were chiefly officers, and wore their best uniforms, regarded him with some interest as he passed like a demigod among them.

Commodore Ellis introduced him in his bluff way to beautiful women and distinguished officers, as he passed towards the end of the saloon, where, seated on a small settee in one corner, was Admiral Ellis, the father of Jenny, and brother to the commodore.

He was a little, dry, spare man, small and slim of limb.

His face was dry and hard as leather, and of a deep fallow tint.

His small gray eyes shifted in a restless and piercing manner from beneath his scanty eyebrows.

His forehead was wrinkled into thin, hard lines, his mouth was firm-set and inflexible, his lips almost colorless.

His feet were exceedingly small, as were his hands—the latter the color and texture of parchment—the thin, bony fingers nervously entwined whenever he spoke or seemed in thought.

At the first glance Tom could determine his character.

He knew that he stood before an iron man of discipline—a strict martinet; whose word was law, whose frown a terror; who stood the tyrant of his quarter-deck, his hundred seamen flying at the sound of his harsh, dry voice.

There was nothing kindly in his aspect—as there was in the bluff countenance of the brother whom he was in every respect so utterly unlike—but Tom could see that his was the eye for command, the mind for skillful arrangement of his forces, the heart, albeit almost shriveled in his breast, that would beat its last throb for duty and the honor of his country.

He fixed upon Tom his penetrating gaze as the commodore introduced him; austere waving him back, he said:

"I've heard of you, sir—rescued my daughter from violence, my brother from robbery—sort of thing they write of in story-books; but come, I am a king's officer, as you see; before I regard you as officer or gentleman, you will pardon my desire to see the credentials that establish your claim to the decorations I see on your shoulders."

He glanced at Tom's epaulets.

"I have much pleasure, sir, in handing my commission for your inspection," our hero replied, with a polite bow, as he gave the little ad-

miral the captain's commission he had secured in the Brazilian service.

A few moments' perusal satisfied the scruples of the punctilious admiral.

He saw that our hero's commission was marked with exploits of a daring nature, for Tom had actually rendered good service to the Brazilian Government.

Rising from his seat he held out his hand, and with more warmth than could have been expected, exclaimed:

"Pardon my scruples; allow me to say I'm well satisfied, and that these proofs accord with my own impressions. As my brother observed, a brave man is always a welcome friend, and though I'm sorry so fine a young fellow is not in our service, I am proud to meet you under this roof."

Tom bowed graciously to this generous reception, and the little old admiral, giving him a swift glance as he turned away, reseated himself, and with a dignified wave of the hand indicated that the interview was at an end.

But after he had watched our hero led away by the commodore, he sat back in his chair with his thin hand clasped before his thoughtful brow.

As the commodore and our hero were sitting by one of the bay windows, our hero's attention was drawn towards Jenny Ellis, who was seated almost opposite to him.

She was attired with the utmost simplicity, yet with such exquisite taste that many brilliant toilets near her looked quite garish and vulgar beside her.

A few pearls dropped like mistletoe berries from among her light tresses, a necklet of the same, with a splendid opal suspended like a cross, encircled her fair bosom.

Tom watched her fixedly, and saw that, in spite of the soft color of her cheeks, she was affected by an uncontrollable emotion.

Her bosom heaved as if she sighed, very—very often, and there seemed teardrops glistening from her drooping eyelashes.

Near her, but apart from each other, were two young gentlemen, the very opposite of each other in look and behavior.

They were each dressed in the uniform of naval lieutenants, the one to Jenny's right apparently being the senior of the two.

He was tall, well-formed, with broad shoulders and expansive chest, handsome, too, but not the prepossessing beauty of honored manhood.

There was the proud look of a fallen angel in his flashing eyes, and Lucifer himself could not have wreathed his lips in more withering scorn than were his, as he gazed from Jenny to the other—his rival.

The other, a little younger of the two, was slighter built, but well-knit of limb, his face fair, and of the Grecian mold; his eyes were singularly soft in their expression, but flashed with a wild light when his gaze encountered the scornful look of the other.

While Tom was contrasting the appearance of the two, and getting considerably drawn in favor of the last described, the commodore touched him on the shoulder, and with a sigh observed:

"Ah, there is our sad secret. Those two young men were fast friends once, but see what bitter rivals time has made them."

"Rivals!" Tom echoed.

"Yes, they both love Jenny. He on the right is a young man of good estate, the Hon. Archibald Gaston. My brother has thought fit to select him as Jenny's future husband. The other is Lieutenant Henry Vere; he is of good family, but has nothing else except his commission in his majesty's service to offer in his own behalf. He is aware that his pretensions are discountenanced by my brother, yet, strange to say, persists in being head over ears in love with Jenny."

"And the lady—"

"Stranger still, leans towards the one whom her father disapproves. Ah, see how they regard each other! There will be bad blood between them some day."

As if conscious that he was the subject of remark, the Hon. Archibald Gaston presently moved away, and soon after, the dinner having been announced, the whole party proceeded to the room where the delicious banquet awaited them.

It was a feast that did credit to the generous giver.

Rich wines flowed, and the rarest dishes were placed in profusion before the guests.

Under the influence of such good cheer the spirits of the visitors arose.

Bright bewitching glances shone from lovely eyes; smiles were freely bestowed, and merry laughter rippled from the lips of beauty.

In the midst of the general enjoyment a privileged servant brought an official missive to the little old admiral, whose brows pursed up when he had read it.

"A strange thing," he observed, aloud. "I have received a dispatch here, and as we are all, I trust, in one cause, I will state its nature. This missive states that the daring boy-depredator, whose career is now so notorious—this Captain Tom—not satisfied with his practices at sea, has had the temerity, not to say the impudence, to run his ship to England, and is believed to be at the present moment about our coast."

"Of course he is disguised; so, doubtless, is his vessel," the admiral continued, when various comments had been made; but, gentlemen, as you are all king's officers, and will soon be on your cruise, I trust a very short time will elapse before this boy-criminal is cut short in his desperate career, and brought ignominiously before his judges, who will know how to deal with him. I say we are all his majesty's officers—our honored guest will pardon the allusion; but I presume I must except him?"

He glanced at Captain Tom Drake.

Our hero had been sitting, feeling very much as if a score or so of thunderbolts were buzzing about his ears, but his countenance never changed, and the admiral, who had given him one of his hasty, piercing glances, bent his eyes again to the paper.

"What a very interesting creature this Captain Tom must be!" observed one bright-eyed maiden. "We hear so much of his daring, and no one seems able to take him."

"He must be very handsome and noble," another observed, "and so brave. We hear continually how he goes about in disguise; actually being sometimes on board the very ships sent to take him. He must be very clever."

"Clever or no!" exclaimed the commodore, reddening, "I only hope it may be my fortune to take him under one of his disguises. The hospitality of my roof should not shelter him. I should not consider my duty done till I had handed him over to be punished for his crimes."

"Oh, commodore! and he is so young."

"And they say he carried off his bride when she was to be married to some one she did not like."

Jenny raised her blushing face at this remark, and a quick glance passed between her and Harry Vere.

Suddenly every one's attention was directed towards our hero.

"Oh, Captain Grey!" exclaimed Lady Arbuthnot, a peerless woman of seven-and-twenty, "you have been all around the world, and you must have surely seen this paragon of perfection—this Will-o'-the-Wisp gentleman, whom our entire fleet cannot subdue or ensnare; do tell us—have you seen him—is he so handsome as they say? is he really brave—is he—is he like you?"

This was a direct thrust; our hero thought it best to evade it.

Glancing carelessly at his arch questioner, he replied:

"Should it fall to my lot to meet this famous boy, rely upon it your curiosity shall be satisfied; indeed, I will pledge myself to capture him and bring him in fetters to your presence, to answer for himself."

"That will be too generous," Lady Arbuthnot replied, her splendid eyes flashing a look upon our hero that thrilled to his soul.

The little old admiral looked up at this moment.

"You had better deliver yourself in propria persona, Captain Grey," he said, dryly, "for really the description given of him is marvelously like yourself."

"Indeed," Tom said, laughing gayly, "then I may deliver myself, already bound, to some one of these fair ladies, if one can be found ready to take the charge of so humble a character."

The bluff old commodore laughed heartily.

The idea of Captain Grey being the Boy Buccaneer, was a most excellent joke.

Tom felt certain that he entertained no suspicions.

Of the admiral he was not quite sure—there was something he did not like in the little old officer's dry cough and dry laugh.

At this juncture matters were nearly brought to a crisis by an unforeseen circumstance that may be briefly explained.

The redoubtable Jerry Mizzen and his faithful messmate, Bob Hauler, had, like their chieftain, sallied forth that night in search of adventure.

It happened that while they were indulging in a convivial glass at an inn by the wayside, two gorgeous flunkies entered, and by their conversation enabled our pair of worthies to hear that they were going out that evening to attend a grand party.

The mere description made Jerry's mouth water, but when it came to the mention of the pretty lasses below stairs, whom they were privileged to kiss, Jerry got frantic with excitement, and a whispered conference between the two resulted in a hastily-formed plan to make the two

flunkies drunk, exchange clothes with them, and sally forth to supply their place.

"We might pick up summat, you know," Jerry observed, with an eye to the stray forks and spoons.

It is not needful to relate how they succeeded in their subtle plan.

Suffice it that, in less than thirty minutes after, they were to be seen wending their way toward the house of Commodore Ellis.

They were a little bit taken aback at the scene before them, and their awkward attempts at waiting excited many animadversions, to which, however, copious draughts of wine had made them proof.

While the conversation was going on about Tom, Jerry, who had smuggled sundry articles of light value, amused himself by lolling out his tongue in his cheek, in a very significant manner at Bob Hauler, and was in the act when a majestic word of command from the head-serving man sent him to attend upon Tom.

Our hero was speaking, and Jerry was standing behind them when their eyes met.

The effect on Jerry Mizzen was electrical.

He started back a step, and with a smothered ejaculation, stood staring open-mouthed, and with his eyes fixed at his youthful captain, over whom, in his sudden fright, he had scattered the luscious jelly he had been sent around to serve.

Tom's features never changed a muscle.

Looking Jerry sternly in the face, he said, angrily:

"Have you no more care, fellow, than this. Fetch a napkin instantly, and remove this stain from my coat."

"Ay—ay, skip—yes, sir, I mean—oh, Lor'—"

Commodore Ellis plucked Jerry by the shoulder as he was sidling away.

"You stupid clown!" he exclaimed, "who are you?"

"I'm Jerry—leastways—oh, Lord—my—"

"Rogue! scoundrell! you are unfit to attend upon gentlemen! See that he leaves the house at once!"

The head waiter assisted Jerry out.

Glad enough was he to escape.

In his fright he forgot to take out of his pocket a dozen or so of gold and silver spoons.

He did not feel safe till he and Bob Hauler were far away.

Then only did the frightened Jerry venture to speak.

"Blowed if I ain't skeared, Bob. Oh, Lord, if it isn't a mercy I didn't shriek right out when I clapped my peepers on that h'apparition. To think of him doing the grand with all of them nobbs, and every one on 'em having in their blessed pockets a proclamation of a thousand pounds for his capture. Shiver me if he don't bang the devil!"

Tom's amazing coolness having got him so far through the evening, he was in high spirits when the desert was ended and dancing commenced.

He found no lack of partners.

Many a fair bosom palpitated warmly against him under the slight pressure of his arm; many a wistful glance was cast after him as his handsome form disappeared among the crowd.

At an early hour he had claimed Jenny for his partner, and she was being subjected to the importunities of the Hon. Archibald Gaston when Tom gallantly led her off, to the evident mortification of her persecutor.

It struck Tom, as they waltzed joyfully around the room, that the slender, supple form clung with something of a trusting confidence towards him, and that the face beamed a grateful look whenever his glance encountered hers.

After the fascinating dance was finished, he led her to a retired part of the room, where the rich perfume of flowers, and the soft music stole pleasantly upon them.

He had purposely led her there, that he might have a few moments' conversation with her, for he had already conceived a strong interest in her fortunes.

He saw that she loved Harry Vere, and that she regarded with abhorrence her proposed union with the suitor whom her father favored.

By instinct they seemed to understand each other.

They conversed long and earnestly, and when they arose there was an excited flush of pleasure on Jenny's cheek, and a glad light beamed from her eyes.

She trembled slightly, and her hand rested in Tom's with more than sisterly affection.

As for our hero, his cheeks beamed with a manly pride; he had formed a daring scheme, and now he set about effectually carrying it into execution.

That scheme was no less than getting Jenny and Harry to elope, and be married to each other before their flight could be stayed.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO DRAWN SWORDS.

THE gardens belonging to the commodore's mansion were lighted up by myriads of lamps, and here, while the night was still young, a throng of guests promenaded.

Commodore Ellis had his grounds laid out with excellent taste; the statues and vases, the rare flowers, the velvety slopes of grass, all elicited admiration; and there were secluded, fairy-like bowers and glades, where lovers might stray and breathe the very soul of romance.

Our hero, after his conference with Jenny Ellis, quitted the heated saloon, and descending by the conservatory, passed out into the open air.

He was in search of one who was almost a stranger to him, but in whose welfare he was interested.

He sought for him fruitlessly for some time, but as he was anxiously scanning every form, Lady Arbuthnot came hurriedly from one of the glades, and putting her small hand softly on his arm, said, huskily:

"The rivals have met. They stand at the end of the avenue, each with his sword raised to take the other's life. Follow them, while I bring the revelers upon them."

She hurried away before he could reply, and our hero walked quickly along the glade.

Stepping behind the trees, he saw the glittering of steel, and was upon the combatants before they perceived him.

Archibald Gaston alone had his sword drawn. His fine features were distorted with passion, foam coated his lips, and he stamped his feet in fury.

"If you are not a coward," Tom heard him say, his face livid with rage, "draw and defend your worthless life. Curses! I saw you dallying with her hand; and I tell you, worthless beggar, I would sheathe this weapon into your heart and hers, before I would see her your prize!"

Those were hot words.

Henry Vere met them with words as fierce, and the next moment his sword crossed Gaston's.

They were standing almost foot to foot, regarding each other with deadly hatred; each eagerly seeking an opportunity to transfix his adversary's heart, when Tom stepped from behind the cluster of trees.

He had drawn his sword, and the lithe, well-tempered steel bent down the two opposing blades as they were tilted for a murderous thrust.

Keeping them apart by a wave of his hand, Captain Tom stood between them.

"No sword-play here, gentlemen," he exclaimed; "there is a fitting time and place for affairs of this kind—this is neither."

Gaston glared savagely on the slender figure of the boy intruder.

"To the devil with your interference!" he cried. "My sword was at the reptile's throat!"

"Liar!" Henry Vere exclaimed; "but for this interference, your carcass would ere now have been carrion at my feet."

"Try, then, who can first carve carrion!" Gaston shrieked, hoarsely. "And you, headstrong fool, keep back, before both our swords be in your breast."

"Leave us," Henry Vere said, "you cannot interfere; we have sworn to fight till one lies bleeding and slain."

Their swords crossed.

In a moment a purple flush swept to the noble brow of the boy cruiser.

Like lightning his keen sword circled through the air, and a second time battered down their weapons, knocking Henry Vere's from his grasp, shivered to the hilt.

"And I have sworn you shall not fight here," he cried, his breast expanding as he spoke. "Lift a hand again, and you shall learn what it is to be brained by a devil."

The impetuous boy's whole form rocked in his fierce passion; the thin veins were swollen on his temple, and his eyes literally blazed.

The graceful stripling was, in an eye's twinkling, transformed into a formidable foe.

For a second Gaston drew back daunted; but instantly his proud soul swelled with fury, and he would have met the attack of Tom, but the sound of excited voices and hasty feet told him that the guests were coming that way, and he sheathed his sword with a savage snap.

"I will not slay you unarmed," he exclaimed, casting a withering look of hate on Henry Vere. "This meeting is deferred, not relinquished. I shall know when and where to seek you. For you, sir," he turned upon Tom, "you will understand that the satisfaction I expected for this is your life."

Tom replied only by a haughty smile of disdain, and Gaston, choking with rage, left the spot.

"Come, sir," Tom said to Henry Vere, who stood half confounded, "pick up your broken sword and accompany me. We shall have curious eyes upon us if we stay."

Tom led the young lieutenant aside as the guests came hurrying to the spot.

"I must ask pardon of Mr. Vere," he said, sheathing his sword, when they had reached a more secluded avenue; "but I have reasons for my interruption—reasons which, I believe, will satisfy him when he hears them."

"Reasons!" the young officer exclaimed, hotly; "what reasons can satisfy me for taking my enemy from my sword's point?"

"Urgent ones. The cause of your angry meeting was your rivalry about Admiral Ellis' pretty daughter. Now, had I allowed you to fight, you might possibly have been killed, in which case your rival would have been left to possess your lady-love; while even had you succeeded in killing him, either you must have been forced to fly, or have been arrested to answer the charge of slaying him; so that your chance with the admiral's daughter would have been quite as hopeless."

"I am not in the habit of giving explanations of my conduct," Tom continued, a flush mounting to his cheeks; "but I give you these reasons because I am interested in your suit, and should like to see you successful by other means."

"What hope have I?" the young lieutenant exclaimed, bitterly. "Her father is against me, because I am not equal to my rival in position. Curse him! why did you give him a chance to depart? He will make the worst of this, and tomorrow I may endure the bitter humiliation of having to answer the charge of lifting my hand against him, for he is my superior officer; but let him beware!" Henry Vere continued, fiercely; "there is bad blood between us, and if he degrades me in her eyes, he shall answer with his life!"

Tom laid his hand gently on the excited youth's shoulder.

"Lieutenant Vere," he said, "the lady loves you. Bear her from your rival—marry her."

"Sir, do not madden me! She would not consent; and, if she would, could I take advantage of her love? Her father would never forgive her, and she would bitterly repent her love for me."

"She never would; her love is woman's love, and that means truth. As for her father—that withered martinet—what is her happiness to him? He would barter her away for a price, and would rather see her dead than disobedient and happy."

"True—true," murmured the young officer, feverishly.

"Why, then, hesitate? This Gaston is your senior lieutenant. If he should inform the admiral of this night's encounter, you would lose your commission, and be banished from his doors. Now, if you married Jenny, he might relent when he saw he could not undo the tie; if not, the world is before you; you could battle for your young wife, and in some distant land of enchantment could live a life of joy, if you shrink from a more stirring and brilliant career."

"No career would lie open to me, if I am degraded from the service."

"A career that I could offer you—rank on the deck of a rover ship, with a crew of daring noble young fellows like yourself, stung by the cursed treatment of the British authorities—a flag that never yields above your head—freedom before you—rich spoils—cruises in the sunny lands of romance—the golden islands of summer seas—these, and possession of your bride, I can offer to you; as for your rival, should you meet him at sea, when his ship and yours were hidden in the smoke of a glorious cannonade, why, then Lieutenant Vere would know how to humiliate his mortal enemy."

The young officer paused, and excitedly looked the young speaker in the face.

"Who are you that tempts me with such hope?" he cried. "Are you a devil, sent in this fair guise to bid me sell my soul for such a dream of delicious ecstasy? Show me how I can gain all you have pictured before me, and I will follow you like a slave, through fire and death, to the end of the earth."

Tom put his face a little closer to Harry Vere's. "I am known as Captain Tom Drake, Leader of the Boy Privateers!"

The young officer looked at him as if he could not believe his ears.

Then, taking both the young chieftain's hands in his, he exclaimed:

"You make the earth reel beneath my feet. I have heard of you, and have often yearned to be among a crew whose daring bids defiance to the world! It has been so bitter to feel the cold scorn of those whose position is above me."

"As it was mine," Tom answered. "I remember when the world had me at its feet—and now who dares raise a hand in my presence! I have had my old persecutors crouching at my feet, and so can you."

"I will if dear Jenny will consent."

"She will consent—I have spoken to her."

"You—then you know of our unhappy love?"

"I won the story from her lips; I am glad I find you true. You must bear her away to-night."

"This hour—no time is to be lost!"

"Leave all to me. A few of my brave crew shall be in readiness at moonfall to-night. You must not see her again. I suspect Gaston's nature; he will report you to the admiral, who will forbid your speaking to his daughter while you are under suspicion. Be beneath her window when the moon wanes—it is a quiet hour; the gray morning will be struggling with departing night, the stars will not give light to betray us. When you see the casement open, be ready to throw a rope ladder up to the balcony and assist her down; we will be near, but wear your sword; your rival is watchful and suspicious, and may be on the alert. Now let us separate; you know your part, leave the rest to me."

The youthful lieutenant gripped Tom's hand warmly.

"You have indeed proved my friend," said he, his manly voice husky with generous emotion. "If I do not repay this kindness with a life's devotion, may the breath of a deadly pestilence blight me in the first hour when I hold my bride in my arms! Farewell for this hour. I have my part by heart; I will wear a sword, too, and if my accursed rival throws his evil visage in my path, I can be rid of him in the same hour that gives me my bride."

The young officer's voice quivered, his eyes were moist; in the gush of his heated enthusiasm he embraced Tom with almost womanly fervor, and hurried from the glade.

Our hero sauntered leisurely along the avenue after his new friend had left him.

Numerous thoughts were crowding into his mind.

How times had changed since he was a fatherless and almost friendless boy.

What an alteration since he served on board the *Arethusa*, and had to bend his proud spirit before the brutal degradations Sanderson chose to heap upon him.

Then he was an oppressed, outraged boy.

Now what was he?

A king—chieftain of a devoted crew, monarch on the deck of a noble ship, whose holds were crammed with the richest treasures; a flag above his head fluttering defiantly in the breeze—loud-mouthed cannon at his feet, ready to speak his defiance to his foes, his name renowned throughout the world—renowned for bravery and skill, that made him the hero of lovely women, and the feared among strong men.

A word from his lips as he stood amid the brilliant throng of guests in the admiral's saloon, and what a flutter of consternation there would have been—how people would have gazed at the princely boy, who, with a price set upon his head, anchored his vessel in the midst of a British fleet, and had the audacity to share the hospitality of a naval officer, and mingle in the society of the very lords of the admiralty who had issued the proclamation for his capture and execution.

The proud boy laughed in scorn at the thought, and instinctively touched the hilt of his thin rapier.

As he did so he heard a rustling of the foliage behind him, and Bob Hauler, as if called there by that gesture, stood respectfully in his front.

"There's been a suspicious serpent a-dodging you about, sir," the honest smuggler said, touching his forelock; "I doubled on the varmint just now, but he slipped away like an eel, and I lost sight of the skunk—but I've come to tell you, as I was afeard some lubber suspected summut."

"Thanks, Bob, for your warning," Tom replied; "it is welcome, though I am too much used to stalk in the heart of danger to be apprehensive when spies dodge at my heels. Where's Jerry Mizzen?"

"He is snug in the kitchen, sir, with the cooks, making love to the servant woman, and trying to catch what he can; for you know, sir, what is said up-stairs oftentimes comes down to the kitchen."

"True. If anything transpires, come to me."

Bob touched his hat.

"Where is Barnacle?"

"He's in the neighborhood, at hand, if wanted."

"Tell him to have the boat ready in three hours."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"And at moonset to be here with an armed party; he can lie in wait in the woods behind these grounds till the hour."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Bob Hauler respectfully drew back, and his young leader, sauntering past him, soon mingled among the festive revelers.

Before one of the elegant tables, spread with ices, champagne, and other refreshments, a group of young noblemen, with several of the lords of the admiralty, were standing or seated when Tom came up.

The magnificent shrubs which embowered the splendid statues and fountains screened his approach sufficiently to hear their conversation without being seen, and the first words that caught his ear made him pause and listen.

"By the way, Claremont, who's that young fellow, Captain Grey? Precious young to be a captain; seems to be in good favor, though—the commodore's awfully wrapped up in him; and even old sky-dry, our parchment admiral, took lots of notice of him."

Lord Claremont, a handsome, careless-looking young nobleman, laughed lightly.

"It struck me he was much favored by the fair sex; pretty little Jenny stuck close to him, and, by Jupiter, if I had been in love I should have been jealous of the way he waltzed all the belles of the evening around the room—Lady Arbuthnot, too. Jupiter Tonans, he's a lucky dog—he can make way with her."

"That's what no other fellow could do, eh, Walpole?" said a third, addressing the first speaker.

"Except Jinks; he's the Adonis for this modern Venus. We shall have the jealous Vulcan taking both in a net, and meshing in irons the stalwart form of our rash wooer."

Lord Augustus Vane—the noble whom they referred to as Jinks—did not seem disposed to hear these remarks good-humoredly.

He was a slim, dignified little man, with evidently as much stamina as a reed; but he tried to look nettled, and tapping the hilt of his sword, pettishly said:

"Look here, Moreton; by jinks, Lady Arbuthnot's name is—aw—sacred in my—aw—estimation; and any—aw—fellow that insults her—aw—shall—aw—answer to me, by jinks—aw."

The young nobleman laughed at this display of temper.

"Don Quixote in disguise," said Lord Moreton.

"No, Lord Lovel," laughed Lord Harry Walpole.

"Or Don Juan!" exclaimed Claremont.

At each of these remarks little Lord Vane turned petulantly away, and uttered an impatient exclamation.

He was evidently used to be teased, and his reckless young companions knew how far they could go without ruffling him too greatly.

"But about this Captain Grey," observed Claremont. "I wonder how the fellow got his ship. He seems in capital case. The hilt of that sword he wears is of pure gold."

"What!" interrupted Lord Vane; "pure gold—pure devils! I'll tell you what—aw—wager you two hundred guineas—aw—it's no such thing."

"Perhaps the blade is silver, and the point a diamond," put in Walpole, sarcastically.

"I shall take Lord Lovel's bet," replied Claremont. "With reference to the blade being silver, the point a diamond, such extravagances have been known; and as the captain is something of a rover prince, he may have picked up weapons as remarkable as any you have heard of."

"Bravo, Claremont!" said Lord Moreton; "you've been dipping into romance lately. Won't you wager that his ship is laden with the spoils of Greek corsairs, and that his cabin contains some dazzling houri, stolen from the harem of some old Pasha, to minister to his pleasures, and sing at his feet the plaintive airs of her native land?"

The laugh was turned against Claremont by Moreton's speech, but when they had ceased their merriment, he said, gravely:

"Romance or no, I'll warrant the weapon of our unknown friend is a tried and trusty one, and that his arm is clever in its use. I observed his build—his limbs are formed for supple strength, and his eyes are like an eagle's!"

"Ha, ha! Claremont grows eloquent," said Walpole.

"Perhaps he knows the strange guest."

"Some famous corsair possibly."

"Or the renowned Captain Tom Drake."

"Laugh on, gentlemen!" Claremont exclaimed; "but I should not be surprised if even that were the case; at any rate, I'll take Jinks' wager for two hundred guineas."

"Aw—you shall; and—aw—I'll bet you another couple of hundred that my sword has a better blade than his."

"Done! And now how shall we prove it?" said Claremont.

"Aw—I'll ask him to let me try it, of course," lisped Vane.

"A very unlikely thing that he will consent."

"You'd have to fight him, Jinks."

"And might try whether the point's diamond made."

Lord Vane got very red in the face.

"Confound you all!" he cried, angrily, "aw—I'll fight him, too—aw—he shall show me his sword, or I'll make it cross with mine."

"And lose your life as well as your wager," Walpole observed.

Lord Vane was about to make some excited reply, when the form of our hero was seen as he came through the shrubbery.

"By Jupiter, here he is! Now then, Jinks, look out!" cried Claremont, as Tom strode up to them.

Our hero was wearing his most careless air, and as if he had heard nothing that had passed, and was walking quietly by, when the young lords accosted him by wishing him good-evening.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," Tom replied, politely, and Lord Vane edged himself in his way.

"Aw—there's a good fellow," he began; "don't—aw—take offense. I'm Lord Augustus Vane; these are my friends—Claremont, a wine-drinking, quarrelsome woman-hater; Walpole, a big-headed, obstinate, good sort of a baby; Moreton, the lady's man, and as touchy as gunpowder—we're all friends—we're just strolled out—ah—damme, will you drink with us?"

Lord Vane got a little closer to Tom while he made this long speech, and now he carelessly put his hand on our hero's sword.

The young chieftain gently stepped back so as to bring his sword-hilt from Lord Vane's reach.

"Upon some other occasion," he said, "I shall be happy to drink with such noble gentlemen; to-night I must beg to be excused."

Lord Vane again stepped purposely in his way.

"Aw—don't go like that—aw—don't, there's a good fellow; we—aw—want to see—aw—your sword; my friend here's made a—aw—statement, and—aw—I—"

Tom drew himself proudly up, and looked down upon the young lordling.

"My Lord Augustus Vane," he said, "I wear my sword for use, and not as a boy for fools to wager upon."

Lord Vane got redder still in the face.

At any other time this answer would have been enough to excite his anger, but now he smothered his wrath, and said:

"Aw—don't be so deuced uncivil. Fact is, my friend here made an—aw—absurd wager about your—aw—sword having a gold—aw—hilt. Walpole, here—aw—hints the blade's made of—aw—silver, with a—aw—diamond point; but I've—"

"Enough!" said Tom; "there is one way to decide your silly wagerings; you are armed, I perceive—the first of the four who can disable me can examine my sword at his leisure. For your personal affront, my Lord Vane, suffer me to say that when I have tried the mettle of men, there will be time enough to notice a jackanapes like you."

He thrust the young lordling quietly aside and stepping back a space, stood with his hand on the hilt of his sword, waiting for the first to draw.

Lord Vane, excited to blind passion, plucked his sword from its sheath, and would have rushed hotly to attack Tom, but Lord Moreton put him back.

"He has insulted us as well as you," he cried, "and shall first give me satisfaction."

His sword flashed from its sheath.

"Not so, he shall answer first to me," Claremont cried, drawing likewise.

"While you are settling your dispute as to precedence," Walpole exclaimed, "this privateer can flesh his sword on me."

"Gentlemen," Tom said, quietly, as the four swords menaced him, "I wait your pleasure."

"I am at your service first," Claremont exclaimed. "Gentlemen, you will give me precedence, seeing that I am concerned in the wager, and may decide that at the same time that I pluck the feathers off this braggart bird."

"Claremont is right," Walpole said, drawing back, and the rest, following his example, sheathed their swords.

Then Tom coolly drew his sword.

Claremont put himself in a posture of easy defense, and their shining weapons crossed.

At the first glance it could be seen that they were careful swordsmen.

There were no desperate thrusts—no hazardous play.

The duel might have been a drawing-room passage of arms, instead of having a life for its stake, they fenced with such elegance and quiet ease.

The gay young noblemen watched every movement of the youthful combatants with intense excitement.

The two thin, bright swords seemed to play about each other like serpents.

A moment's thrust might stretch Captain Tom

or his noble opponent lifeless on the green sward. Their very breath seemed held as the movements of the pair became quicker.

At one instant, Claremont's blade was lunged direct at Tom's throat, the next, and the lordly duelist only saved himself by a parry swift as a gleam of lightning.

Their weapons hardly appeared to cross again, when Claremont was seen to start and turn pale, and his sword, with a dull ring, went whirling from his grasp, and fell at Lord Walpole's feet.

He made no effort to regain his rapier.

He knew he was at Tom's mercy; but he had the soul of a Spartan, and drawing himself proudly erect, he awaited his antagonist's thrust.

Lord Augustus Vane gave utterance to a cry of vexation, and Walpole stooped to pick up Claremont's sword; but as he touched the hilt, our hero, stepping forward, quickly struck it from his hold, and taking the weapon, laid it across his own blade and presented it to Claremont.

Then the noble lookers-on saw that Tom's sword was reddened with his opponent's blood, and that there was a spreading crimson spot on Claremont's breast.

"Take your weapon, my lord," said Tom. "You are winged, sir; and there are others eager to help you pluck the feathers from this brag-gart bird."

With a dash of his hand, Claremont hurled his sword to the earth.

"Strike!" he cried. "Taunt those who yield—life would be a curse accepted from your hands!"

A quiet smile curled our hero's lips, and he sheathed his sword.

"Bind up your wound," he said. "I never strike a foeman twice."

He was turning to see who was the next claimant for the honor of disarming him, when Commodore Ellis came hurrying to the spot.

"How now, gentlemen?" he cried. "What is the meaning of this—swords out and angry looks exchanged? Captain Grey here, too?"

He did not notice Claremont was wounded, as the young noble drew his sash over the hurt.

Lord Moreton answered him with affected gaiety:

"A little passage of arms, commodore. This gentleman and Claremont were trying the temper of their blades—a wager, you know. Young blood will have its excitements. Claremont is pale, you see—he did not hold his weapon well, and is mortified accordingly."

Saying this lightly, he passed the commodore and stepped up to our hero.

"You escape this time, adventurer!" he said, in a low tone of deep passion, "but I will find the opportunity to chastise you like a dog before you leave these grounds!"

Tom's hands clenched; a wild glitter shone in his eyes; swift as lightning the veins arose like cords to his forehead.

For a moment he seemed about to strike the speaker to the earth, or pluck out his rapier and stab him to the heart; but in an instant he calmed himself, and with a quiet, disdainful smile on his lips turned away.

Moreton raved like a madman when our hero had left with the commodore.

"Before the night is over," he cried, hotly, "he shall answer for this with his life, or I will lie dead at his feet!"

"Let us help Claremont in," Walpole said. "He is hurt deeper than he shows."

They gathered anxiously around the young noble.

He was pale as death, and scarcely able to stand.

"I know not if I am pricked to death," Claremont observed, faintly. "Confound my ill-luck! The captain fenced like the very devil. I did not feel I was touched till he drew his sword out of my chest. It's only a little hole he's made, but all my heart's blood seems trickling out of it."

The young lords supported their wounded friend, gazing with tender solicitude into his ghastly face.

Claremont observed their anxiety, and forcing a smile on his features, he said:

"Don't give me over yet, gentlemen. Let me rest here; it is out of sight; and you, Walpole, fetch Vincent to stop this confounded bleeding; and hark, as friends, whichever of you may have the next tilt with this captain, never let your eyelid wink, or you'll have his sword-hilt knocking at your ribs."

The commodore had meanwhile led our hero back to the saloon, and had hardly introduced him to some new guests, when a message came from Admiral Ellis, summoning his brother to his room.

When the commodore entered his brother's apartment he found that personage seated at a table, on which lay a number of open dispatches, with some letters ready sealed for transmission.

The little old admiral's face was as grave and inscrutable as ever; but there was more than usual dryness in his throat when he said:

"Be seated, brother. I have excellent orders for you. Information has placed it in my power to secure this boy-freebooter, Captain Tom Drake, and to offer you the honor of taking his ship. Ask no questions. Here are your instructions, containing a full description of his ship and crew. You will sail in your own vessel at daybreak; by sunset I shall expect your return with the captured pirate. Their leader you will not trouble yourself about; he, probably, will not be on board."

Accompanying these words with a significant look, the withered old naval veteran handed his brother his letter of instructions, which the commodore, too much used to his relative's ways to offer any remarks, took in silence, only bowing as he received them from him; for the formal courtesies of their respective ranks were punctiliously kept up between them.

"And now," said the little admiral, "about your young friend, Captain Grey; he must remain here all night. Have you a room to offer him?"

"My own apartment shall be at the service of my brave young guest, if he will accept it."

A cynical look flitted across the sallow visage of the admiral.

"Press your hospitality upon him. Meanwhile let this rivalry continue—it will aid us in our plans."

The latter part of his speech was spoken more to himself, and taking up a pen, he was soon busily engaged in writing dispatches, which he carefully folded and sealed.

When the door had closed after his brother, who left almost immediately, the little admiral leaned his withered cheeks upon his hand, and mused aloud:

"It is a pity I cannot trust my brother with this secret: he would spoil everything with that great, baby, good, honest heart of his; and he might give this graceless dog a chance of escape because he played the gallant to my daughter. A fine young dare-devil scoundrel to set his majesty's navy at defiance—hum—we shall teach him a different story when we get him in the net. The fellow must have nerve, too, or he never would have outfaced me at the dinner-table when I put him to that test. Almost a pity to stop such a career; ha! quite as well I had my spy on his track. His audacity in coming here is something above the usual run of such adventurers, who are not so anxious generally to put their necks inside the noose. Ah, we'll get him safely caged in my brother's apartment; we'll make no noisy capture—no, no! At moonfall, when all is dark and quiet, an armed party shall break in upon his slumbers, and then, my dear Captain Grey, alias Captain Tom Drake, privateer and runaway, we shall enjoy the felicity of seeing how you will behave with a halter around your neck."

If the distinguished old naval veteran had turned around at that moment, he would have seen a face, with a very comical expression on it, peering from behind a huge, old-fashioned chair in one corner of the room.

The face belonged to our old friend, Jerry Mizzen. He had sneaked up-stairs, after having accidentally, while prowling about the house, overheard the admiral tell a suspicious-looking seaman to follow him to his room.

He had stowed himself away among the lumber in time to hear the betrayal of Tom by the spy, who had brought the intelligence of his expected visit—and was the man Bob Hauler had seen dogging his footsteps—had heard Tom's capture planned, and was now in a vexatious sort of quandary, for, apart from the chances of his discovery, it was of little use for him to know the nature of the snare set for his young chieftain, if he could find no means of putting him on his guard.

Still Jerry was in high glee.

He could not help grinning behind the admiral's back as he heard the old fellow rubbing his hands in glee at the prospect of our hero's expected capture.

Indeed, he could hardly resist the temptation of flinging something at the little old officer's head.

He began to get uncomfortable after awhile.

There was he, cramped up behind that chair, with no power of movement, and there sat the withered old fellow as busily engaged over his dispatches as if he had no intention of quitting the apartment until morning.

Tom found, on his return to the saloon, that his estimate of the Hon. Archibald Gaston's nature was correct.

The story of his encounter with Harry Vere had been told with malicious exaggeration, and the young lieutenant had been forbidden entry again to the commodore's house.

The craft of Gaston had gone even further, and an order for Vere's arrest had already been signed by Admiral Ellis.

Our hero learned all this soon after he entered the room, and a glance at Jenny's tear-stained face showed him that she was informed of her lover's banishment and danger.

When her glance met Tom's a deep flush rose to her cheeks and her eyes brightened.

There was a world of inquiring eagerness in her looks, and our hero saw that her bosom palpitated violently when he seated himself gracefully beside her.

Although so many of the guests were in the gardens, the saloon was still crowded.

Jenny had chosen the most retired part of the room, but even then she was in the midst of a merry party of male and female guests, whose heedless converse fell unnoticed on her ear.

There was some interest excited when Tom strode up and quietly took his seat.

People wondered whether the youthful captain was a suitor of the admiral's daughter.

As for Jenny, her brain was swimming since Tom had inspired her with his scheme for her elopement.

She wondered how he had fared with her lover; whether Henry Vere had proved true, or if the daring flight was impracticable.

Our hero, who saw her eagerness to know, soon lit upon means of informing her.

He saw that it was impossible to get her away even for a moment.

She was closely watched, by order of her father.

It was not an easy matter to foil our adventurer when he had a purpose in view.

Adroitly guiding the conversation, he related the story of an exploit that had befallen one of his officers.

How he had loved a certain lady, whose guardians forbade their union, and how he had won her from a host of rivals.

The fairer portion of Tom's hearers were eager to learn how.

"You shall hear," Tom said. "The lady was gentle, but she loved her daring suitor. Her guardian shut her up in a secure chamber; but at night, just such a night as this, at moonset, precisely, a rope ladder is thrown up to the lady's balcony, her lover ascends, he bears her in his arms; a carriage waits, they flee, and when the pursuers overtake them at daybreak in a little chapel whither they have fled, she leans on the arm of her husband."

"A romantic love-chase," Lady Arbuthnot observed, coming up at that moment.

Other comments were offered.

None noticed that Jenny Ellis had grown pale as death, and that she took the opportunity of quitting the saloon.

None, except our hero, who caught her timid, grateful look as she went, and knew that she understood his story, and would be prepared at the hour named.

Lady Arbuthnot arose immediately afterwards. In passing our hero, a richly jeweled fan dropped from her grasp and fell at his feet.

Our hero picked it up, and was politely returning it to her, when it fell open a little way, and he saw penciled on the smooth leaves in small, round letters:

"You are discovered. Beware!"

His eyes met Lady Arbuthnot's at the moment; they seemed as brilliant as the priceless gem blazing on the costly fan.

She was evidently trying to gather from his looks whether he had seen her warning.

Captain Tom bowed as he placed the fan in her lily hands.

Lady Arbuthnot was evidently ill at ease.

She tried to smile with her accustomed ease as she thanked him.

"It is a curious article," she said, lightly lifting it to her cheek, "and gentle treasures are hidden among its leaves."

"I observe all," Tom replied, quietly, and Lady Arbuthnot, now better assured, quitted the spot.

She encountered Tom shortly afterwards as he was making his way towards the gardens.

She was greatly agitated, and, in a low tone, said, hurriedly:

"Rash boy, why have you ventured hither? The admiral suspects all; a word or an incautious look will be your death-warrant."

Tom doffed his hat gracefully, and the fearless woman, without another word, passed him by.

He understood the reason.

They were watched.

The same suspicious ruffian who had been dogging his steps the whole evening, was behind him now.

If there was one thing repugnant to our young adventurer's impulsive nature it was the idea of being tracked wherever he went by a treacherous spy, too cowardly to come before him and perform his dastard duty for greedy gain.

The princely boy's heart swelled with daring pride as dangers thickened about him; he was aware now that he was in peril.

The few simple words he had seen on Lady Arbuthnot's fan—words that thrilled upon his sight more than the clustered gems that sparkled there like fire—recalled him a little to a sense of the risk he ran.

"I may have occasion to thank the lady for her kind interest in me," he mused; "meanwhile I will be on my guard; firstly, however, I may as well give this houndling spy at my heels a lesson."

Walking on for a few moments in deep reverie, he turned suddenly, and springing upon the shadowy form behind him, dragged the spy from the shelter of the bushes.

The fellow's heart sank like lead—Tom's grasp throttled him.

A dangerous look was in our hero's eyes.

"Worm!" Tom said, "I have had you at my heels long enough; I will spare you any further trouble concerning my movements."

"Mercy—mercy!" gasped the man.

"I'll not take your worthless life, but I'll put you where you'll be safe," Tom replied, dragging the fellow out of sight.

There were several old trees about the grounds, trees with trunks hollowed by age.

Tom bound the shivering wretch hand and foot, and having securely gagged him, thrust him by bodily force through a narrow opening in one of the hollow trees, and left him to his fate.

Commodore Ellis, who had no suspicion of the truth, pressed Tom to remain all night when he encountered him, and our hero, who had his own reasons for wishing to be in the place, readily consented.

When the news was brought to the little old admiral that Captain Grey had retired to his apartment, he rubbed his shriveled palms together and chuckled in unusual glee.

It was something to effect the capture of the notorious boy-cruiser, whose exploits had been as daring as they were audacious.

He went joyfully to his room to be in wait till the proper moment came, for the withered veteran was very precise, and wanted everything effected with noiseless dexterity, so as not to disturb the guests.

When he was gone, our old friend, Jerry Mizzen, whose long back ached with being doubled up so long, wriggled out of his cramped position, and crept out of the apartment.

The little admiral was punctilious in all his acts.

When all was ready for the taking of our adventurer he attired himself in full dress, and with his cocked hat on his head, and his state sword by his side, headed the party who were told off to the eventful service.

On tiptoe they crept to the bedchamber whither Tom had been conducted.

The door was opened noiselessly, and one of the little admiral's band stationed the marines on each side of the doorway.

They had their muskets loaded.

Their order was to fire the instant Tom attempted to escape.

As yet they were in total darkness.

Now the old naval veteran gave the signal.

They heard a heavy breathing under the bed-clothes. Admiral Ellis fancied he detected them move as the light of a lantern was, in obedience to his command, turned on.

Scarcely had the light flashed feebly through the apartment, when he cried, in a voice whose hoarse, stern notes had been heard with effect on an English quarter-deck:

"At the word 'fire,' shoot him dead; advance—halt—present! Now, my bold boy-corsair, awake and surrender—you hear my orders; resistance will be your death."

The muskets were turned towards the bed from whence came a smothered cry, as of human fear and agony; a movement was perceptible beneath the bed-clothes—it was the culprit's tremor.

Admiral Ellis smiled dryly.

"In the King's name, Tom Drake, rise and surrender!" he exclaimed.

The same cry and struggle as before.

The admiral drew his sword, and stepped to the bedside.

With a swift clutch he pulled down the coverings.

In a moment a dark form sprang from the bed and flung itself violently upon him, and brought him to the ground before he could give the word to fire.

The marines, who had at first leveled their pieces, now ran forward in amazed dismay.

Admiral Ellis had rescued from the superincumbent weight of bed-clothes a huge mastiff belonging to the commodore, which had been securely muzzled and rolled up in the blankets to take the place in the bed of Captain Tom.

The little naval officer no sooner saw the trick that had been played upon him, than he struggled angrily to his feet, and cried:

"Search the place, he must be here—unmuzzle the hound; dead or alive, I'll take this Pirate Boy!"

Even while he spoke a sudden tumult arose from below, the cries of furious men—a woman's wailing cry—a shriek as of deadly agony.

Then a voice—the voice of the Hon. Archibald Gaston—cried, in startling tones:

"Help—help! Wake all of you! Admiral, I am slain! Your daughter is borne off by villains! Help—help! Murder—oh, help!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHAPEL UNDER THE CLIFF.

OUR readers will have guessed that the stratagem by which the little old admiral was outwitted owed its invention to the fertile wit of Jerry Mizzen, who no sooner got out of the room in which he had been so long playing the part of eaves-dropper, then he sneaked down to the kitchen to find out from one of the maids in what part of the house the commodore's chamber was placed.

He had been making desperate love to one of the servant maids—a spruce little country lass, new to her situation—and from her he gleaned the intelligence he desired.

His next proceeding was to arouse his boy-leader without creating any alarm.

This was done without difficulty.

Our hero was watchful and on the alert.

At the first soft tap given by Jerry outside he opened the door.

He was dressed, and had his hand on the hilt of his sword.

When he recognized his faithful servant, he drew him inside, and noiselessly closed the door.

A few words explained his danger.

The story did not disturb him much.

A quiet smile played about his lips when Jerry proposed muzzling the dog and putting it in the bed.

Jerry had a knack of getting on familiar terms with dogs, and had already made friends with the big mastiff.

Time was nearly up when Tom and he quitted the chamber, and softly descended the stairs.

The house was in perfect quiet.

The revelers had departed, the lamps in the garden had died out.

A strange calm and darkness had fallen upon the scene so lately full of life and brilliancy.

The armed party of marines were concealed in a lower room.

Admiral Ellis did not wish his brother to know of their presence.

He was afraid that the blunt-hearted fellow, with all his loyalty, would give the Boy Privateer one chance of escaping—preferring to take him at sea, rather than beneath the roof whose hospitality he had bestowed upon him.

So there was no interruption to Jerry's doings. A savory bone brought the huge mastiff to his feet; the gag was adroitly slipped on, and in spite of his struggles, the huge animal was carried upstairs and secured beneath the blankets.

This ruse accomplished, our hero and his accomplice silently quitted the house.

It was time, now, for their night's adventure.

Jenny Ellis had extinguished her lamp, and in the stillness of her chamber awaited the waning of the moon.

Her heart was sad and ill at ease.

Spite of her love and sympathy for Harry Vere, she reproached herself for the disobedient step she was about to take.

At times, too, she was a prey to the acutest forebodings.

What if their attempt should be discovered, and her lover should be slain in her arms?

What if the daring boy adventurer had deceived her, and had only planned this as a means of getting her into his power, and conveying her on board his ship?

What if her lover should, after all, betray her, and leave her deceived and deserted?

She stood by her half-open casement with these thoughts troubling her gentle mind, and her heart leaping at every sound.

Occasionally she listened for any footsteps coming from her father's room.

She yearned to cross to his chamber, and give him one last parting kiss—shed one farewell tear on his silvery beard, but she dared not let him suspect her.

His stern kindness had driven her from his love, and, whatever might be the consequences, her fate for the present was decided.

One by one she watched the bright lamps die out in the garden.

One by one the stars faded from the sky.

Stealthily, as it seemed, a stillness crept upon the scene—a solemn hush that came with the gathering darkness, and crept about her very heart, with its gloomy sense of fear and awe.

By degrees her sorrowful reverie changed to a dreamy stupor—an oblivious lethargy that almost steeped her senses in a whirling forgetfulness, under the influence of which her thoughts wandered from the turmoils of the world, and a sweet calm fell upon her mind.

Hark! a rustling of the leaves beneath her window.

She started, her heart throbbing violently.

A step!

A light shriek escaped her lips.

Something fell softly against the balcony.

The rope ladder.

She aroused herself by an almost unconscious instinct.

She fastened back her sunny tresses, and passing her hands before her white forehead, opened the casement.

It was too dark to see below, but at her feet lay the coils of a silken ladder.

The moon had waned, the wind was whispering among the leaves—all was silence.

She listened on the brink of the balcony.

A tremulous voice breathed her name in a low, fervent whisper:

"Jenny, dearest!"

It was Vere's voice, and she thrilled at the sound of it.

Poor girl, she was in a flutter—half fear, half gladness.

She had her regrets for the step she was taking, but her pure love for Harry Vere, and her detestation of the man her harsh and cold-hearted father had sworn she should marry, made her feel fully justified in taking this desperate step.

It was no time for the exchange of idle though fond endearments.

The young lieutenant, after embracing his trembling love, assisted her down the frail rope ladder to the ground below.

When her little feet touched the soft and yielding grass, Jenny started.

"What have I done?" she wailed. "Oh, Harry, this is sinful, sinful!"

Harry Vere, with his heart beating high in the anticipated fulfillment of his hopes, employed all his arts and eloquence in love's philosophy to prove to his betrothed that what they were doing was sanctioned alike by the laws of God and affinity.

To turn back now would be fatal, he urged.

"But my brother's miniature," she sobbed; "I have left that behind—and this letter. It is to my father."

The young lieutenant looked around anxiously.

"Delay may be fatal," he muttered; "but it must be done. Remain here, dearest. Give me the letter. As you love me, do not move. I will not waste a moment in bringing you the miniature."

Almost before she could comprehend his act he had taken the letter, and leaving her beneath the shelter of the overhanging trees, sprang up the ladder and mounted the balcony.

He hardly seemed to have time to reach the chamber before she heard his quick step returning.

He had the miniature in his hand.

His face was deathly pale.

His eyes flashed wildly in the darkness.

Before he could reach her, she heard another step, and a choking sob of agony rose stifling to her throat as a second figure stepped between her and Harry Vere.

Her lover's rival—the Hon. Archibald Gaston.

Poor Jenny would have shrieked, but fear had made her mute.

Gaston had given her one withering, indignant look.

Now he turned, like a wild animal, upon her youthful lover.

"So," he said, hoarsely, his visage swollen with passion, "this is how you creep, like a thief in the night, to steal this girl from her home—an elopement! It is a pity to spoil your pretty plans; but even against the lady's will I must bar your dastard flight. Back, poltroon! This girl shall not share your infamy!"

Big, beading drops of sweat gathered on the young lieutenant's brow.

He put himself in Gaston's path so as to keep him from the admiral's daughter.

"Touch her not!" he cried, fiercely, "or by the Heaven above, Gaston, there will be deadly work done. Stand from my way! I have set life, honor, position, all on this; and as I am a man, with the power of death in my hands, I will dare all to gain my purpose!"

Gaston uttered a scornful exclamation.

"Spare your threats, hound; this lady is not

yours yet. One word of mine, and we shall have a merry party to see the two runaways dragged back; one like a truant girl, and the other like the knavish cur he is."

"And were that cry to leave your lips," the young lieutenant cried, "this sword's point should choke the other in your throat. I am in no mood for words; stand aside, or draw and defend your life!"

Gaston laughed as the excited speaker's sword flashed from its sheath.

"It is well I have a weapon, too," he said, sneeringly, "or the would-be runaway might play the assassin, too. Stand from between us, misguided girl. When I have stretched this dastard at my feet, I will assist you to your chamber before the world's tongue can wag at your disgrace and your father's shame."

The young lieutenant saw the pleading look in Jenny's eyes as Gaston almost thrust her aside.

But there was no time to heed her supplication—each moment's delay was full of perils; besides, his blood was up.

Gaston's words and his act excited him into passionate madness.

He flew at him as their swords met.

There was a clash—one swift, murderous thrust, and his sword went nearly to the hilt in Gaston's breast.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BLOODLESS VICTORY.

HARRY VERE's bitter rival staggered back with a deathly pallor upon his malignant face, as the transfixing weapon was withdrawn from the gaping wound in his breast.

In the fury and frenzy of the moment, Henry had raised his reeking blade for a second stroke.

But a woman's tender mercy prevented that. Jenny forgot that the bleeding man before her was the one she most hated.

"No—no," she cried, with a hand upon her lover's wrist; "see, you have stricken him unto death."

"It was his own seeking—it was his life or mine, and a life of misery or happiness for you."

Lieutenant Gaston staggered against a tree, and with his eyes upon the devoted pair, he uttered that wild and agonized cry for help which had startled the night air into blatant echoes.

It was only too well heard. Lights flashed in the rooms of the house; a hurried rush of feet, and even the clank of arms could be distinctly heard.

"Now who has won?" cried Gaston, hoarsely, and sank down, dead to what followed.

Jenny now gave way and swooned in her lover's arms. He was transfixed with horror, and the whole house was alarmed. A quick footstep behind him and the earnest voice of our hero awoke Henry Vere from his fatal lethargy.

"Carry her in your arms; follow me!" he cried. "The grounds will be alive with Ellis' marines in another minute!"

How well he had gauged the time.

Scarcely had Vere time to lift the unconscious girl in his arms and turn to follow Captain Tom, than the admiral appeared on the terrace with half a dozen armed men at his back.

Others carried lighted lamps, whose combined light threw a halo around the very place where Gaston lay.

This was not the worst.

Alarm bells rang from all parts, and the commodore was already in the gardens, his drawn sword in his hand.

Henry Vere gave himself up for lost.

"We are surrounded," he said, huskily, to our hero; "hide while they take me; in the confusion you may escape; for me there is no chance."

"Never say yield," Tom replied, quickly. "We are not seen yet; if we can reach the grotto, where my men are placed, we may bid defiance to a host."

Henry Vere was not reassured by the boy-cruiser's words. The baying of dogs in his rear seemed further to unnerve him.

The hounds were let loose.

"Further flight is hopeless!" he exclaimed. "I will halt here, and sell my life as dearly as I can."

"Pause and be taken? Listen, Lieutenant Vere, if you halt for one moment, I will slay you as a white-livered poltroon, and bear your bride to my crew."

Tom's determined look convinced the young officer he meant what he said. He set his teeth together, and, inspired with new energy, hurried onwards with his inanimate burden.

The glare of lights lit up the scene behind them, as now and then a musket was discharged in their track.

The baying of the hounds came nearer.

Dark as it was, their eyes becoming used to the gloom enabled them to see the place where our hero had left his men in ambush.

It was an artificial grotto formed in the natural rock, which here underran the estate. Innumerable fissures, through which the water traveled, furrowed its winding sides, and a ship's crew might have hidden there unperceived.

But the lieutenant did not know what our hero was informed of, that there was a subterranean way to the shore through the grotto, a way of peril and difficulty, but their only way of escape.

When they were almost there, the flare of a score of lamps and torches revealed them to their pursuers.

They were close upon them—the hounds in front; the admiral, white as a sheet, following in the rear.

He saw the fugitives as Tom put his foot on the rock, and in a firm voice he gave the word for the marines to present.

Before they could fire, Harry Vere had leaped upon the rocks, and faced them with Jenny in his arms.

"Fire," he cried, in a deep, excited voice, "but remember, Admiral Ellis, the bullets that bring me down shall make a target of your daughter's breast. We die together, old man, thus, lip to lip, heart to heart, one bullet or a score—we are sworn and affianced now, and death—only death shall sunder us."

Jenny had partly recovered her consciousness, and now, as her lover drew his manly form erect, and she let her fair head nestle on his breast, she heard his words, and knew that a moment might decide their fate; but true to death, she was content to die with him, with her face pressed to his, her fair bosom resting against the strong breast she could feel throbbing defiantly against her.

Even with this certainty of sacrificing his only child, the admiral would have ordered them to fire, but while the fatal word was on his lips, a terrible stupor seized his heart, as he fell speechless and in a fit.

Jenny did not see her father fall; her lips were glued to her lover's in what she thought to be their last caress, and she was waiting for the deadly volley, when the commodore sang out:

"Let loose the hounds; let no man fire while that poor girl is in danger."

He elevated his voice for Lieutenant Vere to hear.

"Put down my niece, villain, and you shall have five minutes' grace to escape; hold her, and these hounds shall tear you to pieces."

"Leap down here," Tom said, in a low tone to Vere, "I will answer the commodore."

As the dogs came leaping on, our hero, who was in the shadow of the rocks, gave the signal to his men.

There was a sudden flash.

The rattle of fire-arms filled the calmness of the hollow rocks, and the two hounds fell, riddled with bullets.

The suddenness of this unexpected volley threw the commodore and his men into confusion, but instantly the marines, believing they were attacked by their unseen foes, leveled their muskets and fired.

The blinding flash was succeeded by a shriek of agony.

It came from Jenny's lips.

The commodore, stricken as if by a bullet, staggered back.

"My God!" he cried, "she is killed!"

Then, with the marines, he rushed forward, but the rocks were vacant.

The whole party had disappeared in the gloom. Jenny Ellis was not hit.

The flash of the musketry had shown her her father being raised from the earth, apparently lifeless, and it was that sight which extorted the scream from her lips.

Harry Vere, who at first thought she was struck, leaped down the rocks with her, in obedience to a word from Captain Tom.

They were in almost total darkness, but he could see the dusky forms of a party of men, who, he judged, were some of Tom's crew.

Our hero took him by the wrist, and in silence they traversed a narrow, winding passage, Jenny again lying senseless in his arms.

The passage became more cramped as they followed its intricacies, and seemed to burrow more and more under the earth.

It was total darkness now; not even the hand of Tom could he see: but he heard the trickling of water.

A pause of a few seconds presently occurred, then the young chieftain said, in a low voice:

"Step carefully, and give your burden to me."

The young lieutenant allowed Tom to take the inanimate form of the young girl, and to guide his feet, as he made the step into what he discovered, to his surprise, was a boat.

"We are safe now," he heard Tom whisper, when he was seated, with Jenny again in his arms. "This is a secret way to the sea—dangerous, and not particularly comfortable—but in an emergency we must dare all risks."

Lieutenant Vere soon experienced the discomfort Tom alluded to.

The air became close and stifling; the heavy moisture beaded their faces.

It seemed as if they were buried alive in a tomb, only that the boat was gliding along slowly, with a sluggish, heaving motion, as if it were sinking deeper into the bowels of the earth.

After a few weary minutes of this progress, the air became so suffocating that Harry Vere experienced the greatest difficulty in getting breath.

He bent down in alarm to Jenny Ellis, who had been breathing heavily, but now lay as still as if she was in the sleep of death.

As he stooped down, Tom grasped his hand.

"We have risked blocking up the inlet," he whispered, his voice ringing strangely through the echoing cavern; "it is a hazardous resource, but it makes all pursuit by this channel impossible; until that stone is removed, even those who know the path would never discover the way."

"How fares it with the lady?" he asked, presently.

"She is in a stupor like death," Harry Vere replied, his voice husky with emotion. "If I lose her now, I can only turn on my foes and die. How long must we endure this torture tomb? I cannot wonder if her tender life has sunk under its horrors. The air chokes me—my heart seems bursting—my blood is bursting my veins—my eyes are starting from their sockets—it would be a relief if I could plunge a knife in my veins!"

"It will be less painful to bear presently," Tom replied, "and you are not the only traveler by this unearthly passage of the tomb; as for your bride, her stupor is her salvation; a breath of fresh air will bring her to. Were she to revive in here, the first breath would choke her lungs and kill her."

Tom said no more after this.

Folding his arms, he awaited the termination of the subterranean passage.

It had already told its tale upon some. Two of the crew lay in the bottom of the boat in a convulsed stupor.

The young lieutenant's eyes were getting accustomed to the gloom; he could distinguish the figures of Tom's crew, as they sat like dusky statues—none moving except those who were guiding the boat in its tortuous passage.

Lieutenant Vere had ceased to feel the painful effects of the close air.

On the contrary, a dreamy stupor was stealing upon him—a stupor that he well understood.

His lungs were ceasing their action, his heart its beatings.

Death, in the form of a subtle lethargy, was creeping upon him.

He had but dimly begun to realize this when a puff of fresh air gave his lungs play, and enabled him to breathe.

Tom, who had been seated immovable, now bent towards him.

"Raise her head," he said, softly; "the danger is over; in a few seconds we shall be on firm land."

This was joyful intelligence to Lieutenant Vere—joyful, too, to Tom's faithful followers.

And now the cool breeze blew freshly against their clammy brows, and a faint gleam of light penetrated the cave—a gleam anxiously watched till it grew broader and broader, and became at last comparatively light.

The crew of adventurers were able to see each other's faces; dimly, but they could see what an effect their underground journey had exercised upon them.

Their faces were haggard and beaded with sweat, their eyes projected, their cheeks were sunken, their lips shriveled; each man looked years older than when he entered that secret way.

Before the struggling light grew much stronger the boat grated on a ledge of rock, and was fastened by Ben Barnacle to a staple in the solid wall.

And now flasks of powerful brandy were produced, and the men revived by strong draughts of it.

A little was applied to Jenny's lips, and her anxious lover had the joy of seeing her unclosed her eyes.

She was still deathly pale, and shivered when her lover spoke to her.

She lay upon his breast for some time after she had revived, during which Tom, with the delicacy of his nature, signaled his men to quit the boat, and leave the young couple to themselves.

When Tom came back Jenny was evidently much the better of her fears.

She gratefully pressed our hero's hand, and forced a faint smile to her colorless lips.

Tom gallantly assisted Vere to lift her out of the boat.

"We are now," he said, "directly beneath the ruined chapel, near the old monastery by the beach. My ship's chaplain is waiting. Are you strong enough to take your part in the ceremony that will put it out of the power of mortal man to sunder you hereafter?"

A faint blush stole to Jenny's cheeks.

Harry Vere looked diffidently in her fair face.

"Dare I dream that you will consent to be mine, to follow my fortunes whatever may be my future? Can you forget all I have done, dearest Jenny?"

He paused at the remembrance of the deadly stab she had seen him deal his rival—he looked in mortified shame at his hand, stained with his rival's blood.

Jenny saw the direction of his gaze, and with true woman's instinct, crept closer to him, and said, gently:

"Can I forget that all you have done has been for my sake? No, Henry, I am yours—yours, heart and soul, till death shall close my eyes."

The young lieutenant strained her passionately to his breast, while Tom looked approvingly on, and then the three ascended by a passage, roughly hewn in the structure of stone, to the ruined chapel, where, in the presence of his crew, Captain Tom saw the truant pair made man and wife.

When the chaplain had pronounced his blessing, Harry Vere led Jenny to our hero, and said:

"Dearest, we must not forget how much we owe to our preserver. He has given me more than life. You must love him, for my sake, as a sister."

The fair young girl ran lightly towards Tom, and uplifted her maiden face for him to kiss.

And our hero, not backward in claiming this virgin offering, tenderly gave her back to her husband.

As he did this, the irrepressible Jerry Mizzen, who could control his feelings no longer, flung his cap up to the roof of the ruined chapel, and cried:

"A cheer, mates, for the bold lieutenant and his plucky bride."

Before Tom could stay the incautious act, such a hearty cheer came from the throats of the men that the antique structure seemed to shake with its echoes.

Three genuine seamen's cheers they gave them, while Jenny stood blushing like the timid, gentle little bride she was, and Henry Vere looked as proud and happy as the lucky possessor of such a treasure ought to have looked.

A strange stillness succeeded the prolonged hurrah.

The daylight came stealing into the grand old place, making its ruins more solemn in the subdued hush of dawn.

Ben Barnacle, who had given a quick, anxious glance around, now leaped up to one of the broken windows, and Tom, following his swift survey, instinctively knew that foes were near.

It was so—the commodore and his men. They had heard the cheers.

Every one in the chapel knew that a danger was brought upon them by that unguarded call.

Jenny went a shade paler, but looked more assured when Tom spoke.

"Our friend, the commodore, is coming this way. Ben Barnacle, you will lead the way to the boat. Lieutenant Vere, you will follow with the chaplain and your bride, steadily, but quickly. We have not much time to spare."

The descent from the chapel was by means of a stone trap behind one of the massive crypts of the grand old structure. It was closed by hidden machinery, and was too narrow to admit of more than one at a time.

The commodore and the party with him would have made an entry before Jenny could have been got out of the way, if the stout old door, which they had hastily fastened, had not shown some strength in resisting their efforts to break it down.

It gave way at last, when the last of Tom's crew had gone down, and our hero alone stood in the ancient crypt.

The commodore, who had growled out a hasty summons to them, bidding them surrender, stopped short on seeing the place deserted by all except the gallant boy, whose handsome features beamed with amusement at the old officer's mystified looks.

"You here, Captain Grey!" he exclaimed, recognizing our hero at once. "Have you, sir, had a hand in this night's work? Tell me, sir, where is that rascal, and where is my brother's child?"

"Your brother's child, commodore, is safe with her husband—safe beyond the power of that dis-

ciplinarian, her father—safe beyond all pursuit you may be disposed to institute after them. Had you arrived a few minutes earlier you might have been present at the ceremony performed under this sacred roof, which made them man and wife. As you were not, you must be content to let me bear your well wishes to the happy couple."

The features of the commodore underwent a complete transformation as he listened—surprise, anger, incredulity, successively stamped themselves on his blunt countenance.

"Are you aware, young sir," he cried, hotly, stepping closer to our hero, "that this dastard whom you have, as I see, aided, had stolen my niece from my roof, and added the murder of his rival to his heinous crimes?"

"Perfectly. Seeing that I advised him to steal her from your roof, that I persuaded him to wear a sword in case he was waylaid by his rival, that I planned the elopement, won the fair Jenny to his suit, and with a trusty party of my crew, kept pursuit at bay till they were safely married, as I have informed you, here, not fifteen minutes since."

A proud, joyous light sparkled in the dark eyes of the daring boy.

Confronted as he was by so many armed men, he stood, a model of princely grace and gallant bearing, his left hand lightly resting on the gold hilt of his rapier, while the commodore, perfectly aghast at his audacity, could only stare upon him as if he could not believe that he was awake.

At length he roared out:

"Are you the devil himself? Confound you, to do all this! Am I to believe this villainous betrayal of yourself? Answer me, sir; and then, if you have done masquerading, show us where that scoundrel and my misguided niece are hiding."

"I have told you, commodore, they are safe from your pursuit. I am not the devil, I hope; but you may be less mystified when you know who I am."

"Who are you—who the devil are you?"

"I am Captain Tom Drake," replied our hero, quietly; "and now, commodore, I wish you farewell. In four-and-twenty hours I shall be out at sea, with your niece and her husband aboard my ship. Should it please you, I shall be happy to exchange a challenge with you there."

For the first moment after Tom had spoken the old sea-dog was thunder-stricken. He looked at the graceful figure and careless features of the princely boy, and his words seemed choking in his throat.

It was an instant or so before he could blurt out his angry speech.

"Then if you were the devil himself, you shall not escape again. In the king's name I command you to surrender. Cover him, and shoot him where he stands if he attempts to move!"

"In the king's name—ha, ha!" Tom laughed; "no—no, commodore. Captain Tom Drake never surrenders for fifty kings, or twenty commodores."

The old sea-dog's rage was fairly roused; he raised his hand as a signal to his men, and himself made a spring at Tom's collar.

But his youthful opponent anticipated his act; there was a click—the stone swung heavily around, and as Tom's laugh rang through the chapel, he vanished from their view.

The commodore, who had found himself clutching at the air, looked at the ponderous stone which had closed above our hero's head as if he thought he was the victim of some wizard's enchantment.

When he found that he was fairly outwitted, his rage was like the fury of a baited lion.

Every effort was made to remove the trap, but the stone was closed securely in its place, and all the king's horses with all the king's men, would never have got it up again, unless some one knew the secret of the hidden spring.

The rampant old fellow was keen enough to understand that either Tom and his party were concealed under the church, or exploring some subterranean passage leading them to the shore.

So, dividing his party, he made a thorough search all around the chapel, and finally finding all attempts fruitless, then left one-half of the men to watch by the chapel, while with the rest he hurried shorewards, having first dispatched a messenger to inform his brother, the admiral, of what had occurred, and relating his intention of at once repairing to his vessel in order to catch Tom's ship the moment it attempted to make for sea.

Admiral Ellis had recovered from his swooning fit long before they reached the house with him, and when he found himself being led from the scene of action, his small, muscular frame stiffened itself like iron, and before his servants could divine his intention, he broke from their hold, and

with a frantic outburst of rage ordered them all in pursuit of the fugitives.

By the time all had left him his iron composure had returned, while his thin lips were set to a cruel firmness, and a harsh look gleamed from his piercing eyes.

He was determined to make Lieutenant Vere suffer the severest penalty of his offenses.

Court martial and execution.

He made up his mind to have his daughter present when her lover's death took place.

Of course he did not anticipate for one moment that the abductor of his daughter would escape.

On our hero, too, he resolved to wreak his vengeance.

He repented now that he had not trusted his brother with the secret of Tom's identity, or at least have made an open capture of the daring boy.

Still he consoled himself with the idea that both would speedily be taken, and he retired to his room to await their being brought before him as bondage prisoners.

The Hon. Archibald Gaston had been carried into the commodore's house, and a surgeon was attending him.

He had been stricken deep, and the loss of blood had weakened him to the lowest ebb.

Many of the young noblemen, informed of the tragic occurrence, had returned, and watched anxiously the features of the surgeon, to judge of Gaston's hope of life.

Claremont had been taken to his home.

Gaston suffered the man of science to dress his wound in silence.

When it was finished, he fixed his dark eyes upon the doctor's face, and said, huskily:

"Doctor, one word. Am I a dead man?"

"You are hurt seriously," was the reply, "but not mortally, unless circumstances should—"

Gaston waited to hear no more.

"Enough," he muttered, a wild light blazing from his eyes. "I can bear all the rest, so that I have life enough left to follow that accursed reptile, whose life I swear to choke in his throat when we meet!"

Admiral Ellis was growing nervously impatient, when his brother's messenger arrived.

When he had delivered his news, the little admiral sprang from his chair.

"What!" he cried, "escaped? Impossible—my brother is mad! Away, for your life—have signals run up—alarm the fleet! By Heavens! if he were ten times the devil they report him he shall not escape! Away, dolt—turn out the shore batteries—challenge every ship, and let the first one that attempts to leave be blown into pieces by our guns!"

The eyes of the excited officer blindly blazed with fury.

A keetic flush glowed on his sallow cheeks.

With an impetuous wave of the hand he peremptorily dismissed the messenger, then, sitting down to his desk, hastily wrote dispatches to the commander of the fleet. When he had sent these off he paced his room in nervous excitement.

"Curse him!" he muttered; "outwit an admiral, and my brother, too—foiled like this—my child, too—oh, she shall suffer for this when she is once more in my power; as for those adventurers, they shall hang in her sight!"

So prompt and effective were the measures adopted in obedience to the admiral's command that our hero, and the party in his charge, would never have left the shore, even, if he had not been previously prepared for the hazards he expected to incur.

When he emerged from the narrow underground passage, he saw the shore batteries, and every part of the coast swarming with men.

Guns were run out, signals and lights of different colors were sent up from every point, and answered by the fleet, among whom the greatest activity prevailed, as they answered the danger signals, and got ready to weigh anchor, and stop the passage of any runaway vessel.

Admiral Ellis was determined not to be baffled this time.

Our hero's practiced eye rapidly scanned the movements made for his reception, should he venture in sight of those who were now eager to capture him, alive or dead.

His daring breast filled with the imminence of his danger, and with flushed cheeks and flashing eye, he turned to Ben Barnacle, and remarked:

"They mean to take effectual measures this time."

Ben Barnacle smiled grimly.

"Never saw them so active. To look at their preparations, one would think a rat could not escape them."

Tom's eyes roamed from the heavy fleet of armed ships to his own graceful vessel, lying almost under the bows of one of the largest frigates.

"There lies our little craft," he observed, "and we must reach her. Ah, she knows her book—she answers their signals—that will divert suspicion from her. And, now, as no boat will pass unchallenged, we must lie close in this broken ground until we have made some alterations in our rig."

"Shall I signal the boat, sir?"

"No; send Bob Hauler down to tell them to send up some fishing disguises for us all."

"Ay—ay, sir," Ben replied, and going back to his party, he sent Bob Hauler on his mission.

The place whence they had emerged was almost under the level of the sea.

It was a broken, ragged fissure, but so tortuously formed that it afforded them a good screen from observation, either from sea or land.

Of course, so soon as they emerged on to the beach, they would have become instantly visible.

This was not Tom's plan.

He waited till the men from the boat brought the necessary disguises.

A few moments effected a complete transformation in their appearance.

A big hood and a cloak, with the assistance of a bushy wig, and the application of a dark wash to her face, rendered Jenny Ellis a capital old fish-wife.

Tom sported a fishing-jacket, and a grizzly wig of stiff gray hairs, assisted by a wash of a deep color, to which Ben Barnacle added a few finishing touches with a bit of burnt cork.

Ben Barnacle himself and Bob Hauler, with Jerry Mizzen, were turned into capital fishermen, while Harry Vere appeared as a most dissipated trawler's wife.

When all was complete, Tom had the boat huddled in under the shore; and the boat's crew having disembarked, Tom, with Ben Barnacle, Jerry Mizzen, Bob Hauler, and Harry Vere—Jenny Ellis lumbering after them in a pair of wooden shoes—got into the boat.

"What name did you give our ship?" Tom asked of Ben Barnacle, as they rounded the point.

"The *Fair Fanny*," was Ben's reply.

"Good; an English name will excite less attention than a foreign one. Give the signal to make all right aboard. I see they've got the British flag up; there's a Swedish vessel in the offing they're crowding around, innocent enough, no doubt, while the real cruiser is under their bows. Ha! you lads must stay behind till you've changed the cut of your trimmings, and made yourselves respectable seamen belonging to the *Fair Fanny*, which ship will send a boat to fetch you from shore as soon as her papers are cleared. Be alert, lads; spend your next hour in the nearest grog-shop, and be ready when you hear the boat's call."

The middies gave a responsive "Ay—ay, sir," to their beloved leader's words, and were soon on their way to the grog-shop, while the boat, considerably altered in its trim, was sluggishly pulled from shore.

Tom himself had taken an oar.

Jenny, with a firmness not to have been expected from her under such a trying exigency, was tugging at the rope which loosened the ragged bit of coarse sail they had set up to their one mast, while Henry Vere, as cool as if he had been accustomed to the business all his life, squatted in the bottom of the boat, busily overhauling tangled fishing-nets.

In this manner they passed under the British flag-ship, the officers and men of which were crowded at the sides, scanning every object that came near.

Presently the expected summons came.

"Ahoy, there, boat! heave to, here, and let's have a look at you!"

Tom stole a quick glance at Jenny.

A tremor had made her start when the officer spoke; but now she quietly seated herself beside Henry Vere, and looked up at the ship under whose figure-head they were passing.

"Lay to, you daft swab!" Jerry Mizzen shouted to our hero, who was pulling his one oar with such force that he purposely swung the boat against the war-ship's side. "See where you're a swinging the blessed boat to! Strike me daft if you ain't as deaf as a sign-post!"

"I'll knock you over the gun'al with the oar, you wishy-washy skunk!" growled Tom, savagely, imitating the tones of a Cornish fisherman. "Who's to know when you're going to stop, you jelly-faced shore-monkey—"

"Stop!" roared Jerry; "didn't you hear them hossifers a bawling to you to lay to?"

Tom uplifted his glance with the most perfect air of disbelief on his face.

"What the devil do them want wi' us? we ain't smuggled nothing out of the king's cutter. We are—"

"We don't know that," the officer sang out from the taff-rail; "you might have a good deal

there we'd like to overhaul. Here, sentry, keep your piece pointed at that fellow in the stern, and give him an ounce of lead in his ribs if the boat attempts to leave."

The "fellow in the stern" was no other than Ben Barnacle, who made a capital wince and rolled over into the boat.

"Don't shoot, mate!" he yelled; "damme, I'm not starting the boat."

"You'd better not," the officer replied, dryly. "Now, young fellows, have you any objection to coming on board?"

"We ain't got the least, your honor," replied Jerry Mizzen, readily; "and maybe we'll get treated to a stiff sip of grog, just to take the salt out of our throats."

"You're more likely to get a cat over your ugly back. Steady, there, you whelp! who the devil do you think wants lubbers like you aboard? Clap on to them chains there, and answer me—where are you cruising to in that wooden dish?"

"We're bound for the *Fair Fanny*—there she is beside of the *Triton*—and a clean craft she be, only her skipper hasn't settled for a cargo of fish he had yesterday," Tom answered, keeping to his assumed voice.

"We've got fish here we'll give you presently," exclaimed the officer. "Keep your piece cocked, sentry. Now, you snail-catching crawlers, have you seen any people making from the shore—a party of officers disguised, and a lady with 'em?"

"Ain't seen no hossifer, except a drunken buff being cleaned out by the shore-women," sang out Jerry Mizzen in reply; "he was as ugly as cussed sin—guess you must be a brother of his'n. Say, buffy, got that gal aboard I seen you tawling with abaft the bittens, last time you went ashore?"

"You scoundrel! I'll sink your ugly craft if you give me any impertinence—answer me, did you see the party described?"

"No, we didn't."

"You are sure of that?"

"Don't you think we could trust our toplights if we had? Tell you we ain't seen nothing of any disguised buffs with a gal in tow—nor don't want to, neither."

"Pass on, then—but first give us the password."

"The what?"

Jerry's tones were not so confident, but he checked it, as was his wont.

"Summut good to eat, eh?" he asked.

The officer laughed.

"All right," he cried; "the password's 'Nelson.' Get your wooden clog of a boat out of our way; ahoy, got any fish there?"

"No, we ain't."

"There's one for you, then—you won't catch such another heavy one between this and France."

Tom and Bob Hauler, glad of the opportunity to get away, were clumsily backing from the ship's side, when the "fish," in the shape of a heavy cannon ball, was pitched into their boat.

It came so suddenly that nothing but the heap of tarred sacking prevented the bottom being stove in.

As it was, the boat careened with such abruptness that Jenny Ellis, unused to such rough progress, leaped from where she sat.

Luckily, the ever ready Jerry Mizzen caught her in his arms, and stopped her mouth with his rough sleeve, at the same time addressing her so coarsely that she shuddered as she heard him.

But she felt grateful, nevertheless; for, but for his promptness, she must certainly have shrieked, and then all would have been discovered.

Ben Barnacle hastily picked up the ponderous missile and stowed it away.

"I say," he sang out to the officers, who were laughing at them from the deck, "going to meet Boney's ships, ain't you? You'll get more fish there than your long stomachs will care for, you half-starved horse marines! and I'd like to be there and see the licking you'll get."

This was hardly official language, but the boat was now comparatively out of danger, and the officers were too much amused with their freak to be angry with the speaker.

Every moment was like an age.

Yet, eager as they were, they dared not quicken their progress, for fear of exciting suspicion.

The distance between them and their ship was at length got over, and with a glad feeling at his heart, Tom heard the boat grate at the side.

The deception had still to be carried out.

One by one they lumbered up the companion-way; Tom staying to see all on board before he followed.

When he stood upon the deck a joyous pride dilated his breast.

"Now let them take us if they can," he said, as he looked proudly around and saw what excellent order the ship was in. "Get all ready, lads; we shall be boarded before we start, and it won't

do to let them suspect our true character by anything they see on deck."

He descended to his cabin to change his dress.

Zeila came gladly forth to welcome his return. She had been very anxious on his account.

"I knew when I saw the excitement among the fleet and on shore, that you were discovered, and in danger," she said, tearfully regarding our hero.

"We have had a risky run," Tom replied, "and are not yet safe; but I think it will try their mettle to take us."

He returned to his own cabin and speedily changed his attire.

Six of his crew were disguised in the fishermen's costume, and sent back in the boat, which they were to afterwards leave, and join the other party at the grog shop.

Tom never neglected any means of secrecy; and he knew they would still be watched from the ships.

Jenny Ellis and Henry Vere, having been furnished with more suitable raiment, were secreted in one of the hiding-places of the vessel.

Ben Barnacle dressed himself as its skipper, and Tom walked the deck by his side dressed as a young officer.

They were not mistaken in their expectations.

Morning was not far advanced when a party of the authorities came on board to examine the ship and her papers.

They were very suspicious, and eyed the crew and equipments of the vessel narrowly.

"I see you have a gun here for defense," the officer in charge of the inspecting party observed.

"Yes," Ben replied, "it is as well to be prepared: the sea-privateers don't make many mouthfuls of an unarmed trader."

Some other observations were exchanged, and the officers, partially satisfied, retired to the companionway.

Here the one who had before spoken paused.

"Are you not very low in the water for your build?" he asked, abruptly.

They were.

Ben could have told him the reason was that they had secret parts of the vessel crowded with treasure.

But he didn't.

He merely observed that it was a grave fault in her construction, and bowed the officer over the side.

As they were descending, a second boat pulled alongside, and our hero recognized the bluff old commodore.

"Have you well searched this?" he asked. The officers replied that they had.

"Hang me if I know what to think," replied the commodore; "there's no vessel here at all corresponding to that infernal cruiser, except that Swedish bark which we've overhauled. I'll have her papers looked to again; it would be a lasting disgrace if, after this, that confounded devil of a boy-cruiser got clear away from the eyes of the British fleet."

They heard him grumbling in a more furious style as the boats rowed away.

Ben stood with arms folded, scanning the exciting scene as if it did not interest him a bit, while Tom seated himself on the taffrail and watched the movements on sea and shore. Presently a cry of delight broke from Tom's lips.

He had seen the boats approach the suspected Swede, which Tom had no doubt whatever was a disguised privateer, and now he saw her sails set with a precision and suddenness that confirmed his suspicions.

She was evidently unwilling to be overhauled a second time, and was standing out to sea in the twinkling of an eye.

As might have been expected, the utmost commotion was caused by this act.

A gun was fired from the fort, but did not reach, and signals of pursuit being made, a light-armed schooner got away from the heavy frigates, and went after the Swede.

Tom's eyes sparkled merrily at the sight.

"Now is our chance," he said to Ben; "while they are after that privateer, and she'll give them a smart run for it, we will gently get away, hoist the blue-peter, and send a boat ashore to pick up our men."

Firing was heard seaward as these orders were being executed, and by the time all hands were on board, the schooner was brought in disabled by one of the pursuing frigates.

The Swedish vessel had shown her teeth and given the schooner a taste of her fighting powers.

It was the general belief that the frigates were in chase of the real rover ship, and so our hero, after his men had been brought on board, was allowed to go quietly out from among his grim neighbors.

As he passed the flag-ship, he saw her yards covered with seamen and officers, who were watching the chase of the Swedish privateer.

Tom had his vessel brought alongside the flag-ship.

He had hastily written a letter, which he now held in his hand as the two vessels almost touched.

"Is there a Commodore Ellis on board you?" he asked, innocently.

"No," sang out an officer, "his ship is after that cursed runaway cruiser."

"I'm sorry for that," Tom replied, "I've a letter here for him."

"You can drop it with us," the officer replied; "we'll give it him when he comes in with the prisoner."

"Thanks," said Tom, dexterously throwing the letter to the other's deck. "Is she a pirate?"

"Pirate—yes; it's that infernal *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, with that boy-cruiser, Tom Drake, on board."

"I hope they'll take him," Tom said; "don't forget to give the letter to the commodore."

"All right; a good voyage to you."

"Hurrah!" came from the throats of Tom's daring crew as the breeze-filled their sails and bore them from the liner's bows.

Little by little they left the ships in the rear, the Needles came in sight, were safely passed, then the last of the British ship went out of sight, even from the mast-head, and the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* stood out to sea.

Then as Tom leaped joyously to the deck, and Harry Vere with his young bride came from their concealment, such a ringing cheer went from stem to stern of the saucy vessel that proclaimed the joy of the crew at their clever escape.

With sparkling eye and flushed cheek, the princely boy-cruiser cried:

"Haul down those colors, knock this lubberly trim off our ship, run up our flag; the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* is at sea again, let her enemies catch her when they dare."

The commodore returned with his ship late that night.

The Swedish brigantine had, after a smart chase, escaped them.

Foiled and angry, he sent intelligence to his brother, the admiral, at the same time stating that he would follow anew on their track, and vowing never to return until he had fallen in with Tom's ship.

Having sent off this news, he was standing on his deck letting off his superfluous steam, when a boat pulled alongside and a middy clambered on board, and respectfully saluted the old naval veteran.

"Well, sir," the old sea-dog exclaimed, "who the devil are you, and what the devil do you want?"

"I'm Midshipman Herley, sir, of the flag-ship *Victory*."

"Well, you young whelp, well."

"This letter, sir, for you, sir."

He handed him the letter Tom had dropped on the flag-ship's deck.

The commodore hastily tore it open.

What a change came over him as he read!

His bluff visage purpled, his eyes literally glared, his teeth champed at his gray mustache, and stamping his foot passionately on the deck, he cried, hoarsely:

"Confusion! who sent you with this? Answer me, you jackanapes, or I'll wring your infernal neck; who gave it you?"

"An officer of the *Fair Fanny*, sir," answered the middy, aghast at the commodore's rage.

"An off—cer—of—the—*Fair—Fanny*!" reiterated the commodore, hoarse with rage. "And where, sir, is the *Fair Fanny*—or *Betsy* or *Jane*—?"

"Went away this morning, sir, while you were chasing the Swede."

The commodore's face was the color of a fine pickled cabbage.

"Went away this morning, confound you!" he bellowed; "then, sir, go back to your officer, sir, and tell him that the *Fair Fanny* that he let slip out of his hands was the ship of the boy-cruiser, and that the officer who gave him the letter was Captain Tom Drake. There, go back, and tell him to put that in his pipe and smoke it, and see how much promotion he can see in the smoke, sir, confound you!"

The commodore uttered a savage laugh, and giving the young middy a cuff under the ear, yelled him off the deck, and then turned to his first officer.

"Look at this, Mr. Fennel; read this—read it, sir, and tell me how you feel afterwards."

Lieutenant Fennel, a tall, austere officer, took the letter and read:

"DEAR COMMODORE:—I hope you may catch the Swede—she has a clean pair of heels; your niece is on board my ship with her husband. Farewell till we meet again.

TOM."

"Yes," roared the commodore—"what after that, eh? Runs through his majesty's fleet, sir—and got away, sir, while we've been chasing that infernal confederate! Crowd up our canvas—double shot our guns—by Heaven, I'll not taste food or drink till I am even with that boy devil."

Without waiting to do more than signal with the authorities on shore, the commodore sailed.

The start Tom had got was against him, but he fell in with a vessel that had been to the same port and was informed of the whereabouts of the famous boy-cruiser.

For the first time since he started the commodore seemed subdued; and standing on deck with glass in hand, he surveyed the horizon patiently for a sight of our hero's vessel.

Captain Tom, after a spirited cruise of a week and more, ran his vessel into a snug little bay off the coast of Africa, and lay there for the night.

It was early dawn when word was brought him that another and bigger vessel had anchored alongside them in the night.

Tom hurried on deck, a strange surmise floating in his brain.

The strange ship lay quietly rocking on the billows, her tall masts almost overhanging his; at a glance Tom could see that she was armed and well manned, and while he was looking at her the voice of his old acquaintance, the commodore, singing out from her quarter-deck, almost lifted him off his feet.

"So you've woke up, you young sea-devil, eh? Surrender, sir! The *Amazon* is up with you, and won't leave you till we've taken the devil out of you!"

"Glad to see you, commodore," Tom laughed in reply. "Have you come to take me back to England?"

"I'll—I'll string you up to my yard-arm," bel- lowed the old officer, "when I catch you."

"Which will not be yet," Tom answered.

"Come, commodore, you wish to take me—if you can bring your ship one mile from the shore, you shall try your hand at taking my ship."

While Tom spoke he had given his men the word of command.

In an instant the canvas was outspread, and the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* stood out to sea.

The commodore was furious at the attempt, as he supposed, to escape.

"Heave to, you ragamuffin, or I'll sink you."

Tom was near enough to him to reply:

"I'm not running away, commodore. I mean to fight you and take your flag."

The commodore had ordered a gun to be hastily run out.

But he did not fire, determined not to be out-manuevered by his youthful antagonist.

He was out at sea almost as soon as our hero was.

Tom kept his vessel saucily in the way, not getting more than fighting distance from the commodore, who was choking like a baited panther all the while.

The two ships were fairly out at sea at last, and the commodore sang out through his speaking-trumpet a summons for our hero to surrender.

Tom sent him back a defiant reply.

Then turning to Harry Vere, said,

"Now, sir, you have a chance of fighting for your bride. I make you first officer. Let me see how you direct your attack."

Jenny Ellis, who had been standing on deck during this colloquy, raised her pale, timid face to her husband.

But Tom, who understood what she meant by that look, took her gently by the hand, and leading her away, said:

"Do not fear for your husband; we have mettle enough here for any of his majesty's ships; and now, as we shall have it pretty warm on deck, will you wait below till all is over?"

"May I not stay here with my husband?"

"Our rules will not permit it," Tom answered.

"Zeila will take charge of you while the engagement lasts."

Zeila herself came on deck and took Jenny below.

By this time the commodore had got a little closer, and again he summoned Tom to surrender.

The idea of his engaging an armed frigate seemed to him preposterous.

"Save yourselves by surrender," he roared, "before we shatter you to pieces."

"We never surrender," Tom replied; "you have seen us run—you shall see how we can fight."

The commodore growled savagely, and gave the word for his men to commence the engagement, and the only language now exchanged was the roar of the cannonading, which soon began to get pretty sharp on both sides.

Commodore Ellis had often had a hot brush with a desperate enemy; but he had never met

such a one who so skillfully evaded his broadsides and so well peppered him in the bargain.

Usually, with the toughest, it was shot for shot, broadside for broadside—the superior weight of metal deciding the fight.

But here was a little vessel, ridiculously inferior to his own in size and weight, literally leaping around his huge ship, and pouring a well-aimed fire into him from all quarters.

And he was getting as furious as a muzzled bear, when a loud cry from his men called his attention to Tom's flag, which had hitherto floated defiantly in the breeze.

A well-directed shot had struck it, and now it came fluttering to the deck.

The commodore pretended to regard this as a token from the boy's ship that they were yielding. By this time the two vessels were hauled to such close quarters that the stern of the *Amazon* was athwart the bulwarks of Tom's ship, and the old commodore from his quarter-deck was within easy hail of our hero himself as he stood among his officers calmly directing the fight.

The fearless old commodore's heart, in spite of himself, warmed towards the intrepid boy—he could not but admire his style of getting his ship into action, as well as the cool pluck with which he maintained the battle.

"Tell that harum-scarum boy to surrender," he bawled out to his first lieutenant, "or we'll blow every timber out of his ship."

Captain Tom received the summons with his usual quiet firmness.

"Tell the commodore," he replied, boldly, "that Tom Drake does not know how to yield—you have shot away my colors, but in twenty minutes I promise to stand on your deck and haul your flag down under my feet!"

When this audacious answer was delivered to the commodore, he gave vent to a genuine British growl, and waved his hand for the cannonade to recommence.

The crew of the *Amazon* fought well, and served their guns as only British seamen can do.

But their system was the old style of heavy pounding; the style of maritime warfare had not been yet changed by the brisk exploits of immortal Nelson—Trafalgar's deathless hero—and the commodore, brave as a lion, and cool in the hottest cannonade, was baffled by the quick maneuvering of our hero's light vessel, whose guns, loaded with canister and grape, swept the decks and scattered destruction around.

There was another circumstance he could not comprehend.

He had given the gunners orders to fire at the hull of their opponent, in order that he might get the boy-cruiser to yield when he found the vessel sinking.

The guns had been well served, and a terrible weight of iron had been hurled against the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*.

But the deadly missiles, in place of making her a complete wreck, though they swung her quite around with the concussion, seemed to do her no damage whatever.

At the same time her rapid discharges encompassed his ship at every turn.

The sailors, true-hearted as they were, began to lose nerve.

They seemed contending against no human foe.

All the superstitious stories they had heard of Tom and his crew seemed confirmed.

And the commodore's cheeks grew pale, though not with fear, when he saw the influence on his men.

The cannonading was sharp enough on Tom's deck.

Ponderous chain-shot came swinging from stem to stern.

The quarter-deck where Tom stood with Henry Vere, ready to board the *Amazon*, was almost untenable.

"They make it warm for us, Vere—no seamen except British tars could fight so manfully."

"They are the real bull-dogs of war," Henry Vere replied, as a huge cannon-ball struck their mizzen-mast, and shivered it in splinters.

"We must make it hotter for them," Tom said, as a number of his crew sprang forward to repair the damage. "Boarders ready! Time is nearly up—in two minutes we must take their ship."

A ready cheer replied—and the boy-adventurers plied the port-holes and deck of the enemy with such rapidity and precision, that the gunners were driven from the guns and the quarter-deck cleared of the commodore and his officers.

There was hardly a standing place clear of the fierce iron hail, and the commodore's brave spirit sank when with a sudden crash his mainmast came tumbling down to the deck.

Ben Barnacle had fired the shot.

As if to add to their discomfiture, a moment

after Tom jumped upon a gun, and pointing it at their Union Jack, brought it down.

The cheer which followed this sudden crippling and humiliation of the commodore's ship had barely died away, when Henry Vere, burning to distinguish himself, cried to the boarders under his command:

"They waver—follow me—death or victory!"

The boy-adventurers, answering him with a loud burst of enthusiasm, leaped to the quarter-deck of the *Amazon*.

A brief but determined conflict ensued as the boys sprang through the smoke.

Captain Tom, who had watched this swift onset with pleasurable pride, uttered an exultant laugh, and unable to keep out of the fray, bounded after his daring lieutenant.

Ben Barnacle's fingers itched to lay about him with a pike or cutlass on the frigate's deck; but his own place was at the guns, and these he served so well that a few minutes' desperate encounter on the *Amazon's* deck resulted in the surrender of the vessel to the princely boy hero.

The commodore himself would never have yielded.

So mortified was he at his discomfiture that he would have blown up his ship rather than have given in.

But with his flag shot away, his vessel crippled by the loss of her mast, and the terrible boy-devils swarming on his decks and taking possession of his guns, there was no resource left.

Tom had judged the old fellow's metal, and when the commodore's first officer proposed blowing up the ship, it was found that Harry Vere and a select party had taken possession of the powder magazine.

The ship was, in fact, in the possession of the boy-buccaneers, and the conflict at an end.

A dull haze of smoke still arose from the frigate's deck.

Here and there rang the sharp crack of musketry as one of the marines fired his final shot, but the deep, sullen roar of cannonading had died away.

The *Amazon's* crew, such as were the survivors of as deperate a fray as they had ever been engaged in, were aft in moody submission—while the boy-buccaneers, leaning on their blood-red pikes and cutlasses, gathered around their idolized leader, and awaited the final surrender of the ship.

Commodore Ellis looked around his vessel in despair.

His first officer, a proud, haughty and brave man, stood at his elbow, goading him to a last effort.

"It is useless," the commodore replied: "with our magazine in possession of these boy pirates, and our decks swept by their guns, we can do nothing. I'd rather die than yield; but we have not even the chance of blowing up the frigate, or else friends and foes should be hurled in the air."

His lieutenant took his sword out of its scabbard, and flung it into the sea.

"That, at least," he exclaimed, "I will never surrender."

The commodore sighed, and, followed by his officers, walked aft to surrender his sword.

Our hero stood on the quarter-deck, looking as jauntily as if he had just gone through a pleasant pageant instead of a deadly conflict.

Henry Vere, trying to look as if he was not awfully delighted at the scene, stood by Tom's side, while the redoubtable Jerry Mizzen, leaning upon a gun, broadly grinned at the commodore's woeful plight.

"Young man," the commodore said, stooping low in his humiliation, "you have conquered us. I know not by what means; for myself, I would rather the first shot had slain me than have given in to your pirate gang; but I have my men to consider, and on that account, finding further fighting useless, I make a formal surrender of my ship. Take my sword; it has served me well, but after this disgrace I could never wish to wear it again."

He handed up his sword to our hero.

Our hero's saucy feelings left him as the brave commodore, bowing low, almost touched him with his gray beard.

Daring as the noble boy was, he was high-spirited enough to admire courage in a foe, and be magnanimous in the hour of victory.

Besides, he saw that, as the commodore stooped, a tear fell to the deck.

"Commodore," he said, "the fortune of war has given your ship into my hands. I accept your surrender. You were sent out to capture me—to treat me as a pirate; may I ask what was to have been my fate had I been taken?"

"My orders, young sir, were to hang you from my yard-arm."

Tom's face flushed.

"Then," said he, "return to those who gave

you that order; tell them you met me at sea—that I took your ship, as I will any other ship sent out to take me. Keep your sword—I give you that; take your ship, but tell the admiralty that if they dare to send another war vessel after me to capture me as a pirate, I will take the ship they send and blow it into the air."

He handed back the commodore his sword, and an admiring murmur ran along the ranks of his boy crew.

The commodore reeled as if he had been stricken by a bullet.

"Receive back my ship!" he cried. "Give me an hour to prepare, and I will renew the fight—"

He paused—his own ingratitude struck him to the heart.

Dropping his sword to the deck, he suddenly seized both hands of the impetuous boy, and cried aloud:

"Forgive me, noble boy—I thank you for your gift; I will return, and lay your message before the admiralty. I know they have proclaimed you pirate; but I may have influence enough to alter their decree; if so, you might serve our country instead of being its foe; if not, should they repel me, I know how to act according to that honor which I have never sacrificed yet—I can blow out me brains."

"And deprive England of a good officer," Tom said, in reply. "No, commodore, a brave man should bear his defeat."

"And I will bear mine," Commodore Ellis cried. "One more request—my niece, my brother's child—can I speak with her? I will not ask her rash abductor," he exclaimed, glancing hotly at Harry Vere. "I ask it of you, as the commander of your ship."

"I will not deny you," Tom answered, "come with me to my ship. You shall see the lady, and if she wishes to return you shall take her back to England."

"And me with her if she consents to go," Harry Vere cried.

"We should not take you so far," the commodore's first officer exclaimed; "we should string you up there like a dog, before you saw old England."

Harry Vere laughed in reply, and leaving the discomfited officer on that shattered deck, Tom, with the commodore, and his boy crew, returned to the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, from which their movements, since the surrender, had been anxiously watched.

"Let Lieutenant Vere's wife be requested aft," Tom said to one of his crew.

Little Kanak ran down to the cabin, and soon Zeila appeared, leading Jenny by the hand.

The young wife was anxiously awaiting the permission to see her husband, into whose arms she rushed before she even remarked the presence of the old commodore.

When she saw her uncle she drew back bashfully, but an instant after, running forward, threw her arms about his neck.

"Uncle, dear uncle," she cried, tears filling her eyes, "do not chide me, I—I am so happy!"

"Chide you!" cried the commodore, huskily. "You—you—baggage, to run away from your father, and cause this havoc, and desert your foolish, fond old uncle—I—I—go—no—hussy—I—won't say a word to you ever again."

In spite of all his furies the old salt's sternness gave way.

He turned aside to hide his tears, and Jenny, her own tears mingling with his, flung her arms around his neck and tenderly kissed him.

CHAPTER XV.

TOM TALKS TO HIS MEN—"NEVER SURRENDER!"

WHAT Jenny said to the commodore, as she lay dutifully nestling to his breast, was sufficient to make him think less harshly of her conduct in running away from her father; and had Harry Vere's only offense been marrying his pretty niece, the gallant old sea-dog might have overlooked that offense, too, but the young lieutenant had sinned deeply in his sight.

His attack on his superior officer, Gaston, and his defection from his duty, were crimes too heinous to go unpunished, and, though the old fellow would have grieved to deprive Jenny of a husband, he would have considered it his duty to carry out even the sentence of death against Harry Vere.

Jenny, simple-minded as she was, could not understand that her husband had erred so deeply; she tried to lead the commodore to him, and putting on her sweetest look, said, pleadingly:

"You have forgiven me; you must forgive my husband, too."

"I will forgive him, and even intercede for him—scoundrel as he is—on one condition."

"And that is," said Harry Vere, stepping forward.

"That you surrender yourself a prisoner, and accompany me back to England to answer for your crimes before a court-martial."

Harry Vere lovingly took the hand of his fair young wife, as he replied:

"Surrender myself! yes, commodore, I will; but it shall be when I am weary of life—wearied, too, of this dear being whom I now proudly call my wife."

"Reflect, sir," the commodore exclaimed. "If you surrender, I might have power to save you; if you are taken—and taken you will assuredly be—be your career long or short—expect no mercy from us!"

"Commodore," Harry Vere said, "I expect none; there is no such thing as mercy for me at the hands of British authorities. When I am taken I shall prepare to die an ignominious death."

He put his arm lovingly around Jenny's waist, as he spoke, and fondly looked into her tender blue eyes; and the commodore, finding he could exercise no influence over Harry Vere or his niece, took a brief farewell, and departed for his ship.

The two vessels parted company, and in an hour's time were almost out of sight—Tom steering for a fresh cruise, the commodore making for the white cliffs of England, to tell the story of his defeat and the failure of his enterprise.

When the old fellow went back to his vessel, he fancied that he was regarded coldly by the officers and middies who were gathered on the *Amazon's* deck.

He was not deceived.

Lieutenant Fennel, a strict martinet, a man molded to a stern iron sense of duty, could not conceive it possible that a British officer, after suffering such a defeat, could make a friendly visit to those from whom he had met with such disgrace.

His looks plainly told his feelings, and though he served the commodore with the respect due to him as a superior officer, he exchanged no words with him beyond what he was actually compelled to do.

During the whole of his passage home, though, he wore no sword; once he appeared without his epaulettes, but Commodore Ellis ordered him to resume them.

The same cold, studied respect met the commodore from all hands on board the frigate. Men, officers, and boys seemed to feel their commodore's humiliation, and in silence they did their duty.

Commodore Ellis understood all this.

He heard, too, that it was Lieutenant Fennel's intention to ask leave to change from his ship as soon as they reached England.

All this amounted to an imputation of cowardice on the part of the commodore, but the brave old salt, though keenly galled and stung to the soul by the humiliation of that homeward journey, bore all in moody silence.

He might have made the frigate a floating torture-room, but he remembered the time when those same officers and crew had followed him into the deadly peril of victorious battles, and how noisy had been their cheers as they gathered around him after the fight was over, and like the brave old sea-dog he was, he forgave them the imputation on his courage.

But very often, as he sat in the privacy of his own cabin, did he examine, with stern but quiet resolve, his handsomely-mounted pistols.

When the time came and he had to meet the brow-beating accusations of the Admiralty, he knew how to vindicate his honor as became a British officer.

Very different was it on board Tom's ship.

The boy-crew were delighted with their victory over the vessel sent to take them and execute their leader, and while the frigate sailed sullenly homeward, a fresh breeze filled the sails of the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* as she crossed the seas on her new cruise of adventure and daring.

On the day after their parting company with the commodore, Tom summoned his crew aft to the quarter-deck, and gathered them around him under their defiant flag, which now floated ominously in the wind.

Zeila, the corsair maiden, reclined at the feet of the princely boy-hero, Jenny sat by the vessel's side, gazing lovingly upon her husband as he stood by Tom's side.

Ben Barnacle—his manly features stamped with a noble devotion—was, as usual, close to his daring leader, for whom he would have cheerfully laid down his life.

"I have called you aft," Tom said, "to tell you that as we have now been some time engaged in our buccaneering career—in which we have been, as I hope we ever shall be, brilliantly successful—it is as well we divide our immense spoils."

You know that we are all agreed to share alike, and the share of each of you already amounts to the value of a thousand pounds. Now, if there be any of you who would like to relinquish his career, he shall be given his share in money, and put ashore at the nearest port; the rest who agree to remain under our victorious flag will cruise with me from sea to sea, gaining fresh booty; but, of course, with the hazard of the dangers we must incur while engaged in these enterprises."

The first and concluding parts of our hero's speech were received with loud and prolonged cheering; but loud cries of "No," responded to his question if any were ready to leave the ship.

None were disposed to retire from the freebooting career, and when Tom had assured himself of this, he continued his address, his fine features beaming with enthusiasm, for reckless as he was, the devoted daring of his crew pleased him.

"We sail, then," he said, "on our new cruise in quest of adventure. It has pleased the authorities at home to proclaim us pirates, to set a price on our heads, and to menace us when taken with an ignominious death. They forget that they have driven us from the service, that our bitter wrongs made us take up arms against them. We have defied them, and take us they never shall. You must swear all of you to abide with me, to follow my orders in all things, and, if the time comes, to die with me, for we will never surrender. When no hope is left, I swear to blow this ship into the air."

A noble look of enthusiasm was on Tom's face.

The boy-cruisers took up his words, and a cry of "Never surrender!" rang along the breadth of the noble ship.

Then Tom continued:

"Though they have branded us pirates, we have never been pirates yet, and never mean to be. Of course we mean to fight for our ship, and if necessary, to take or sink any vessel sent to pursue us; but our mission is not to fight against our country. The career I have fixed upon—the career in which I hope we will distinguish ourselves, and make a name to be remembered—ay, and revered throughout our dear native land—for, proscribed outcasts that we are, we love our country still—is the career that first crowned us with laurels, and gave us this noble ship. We will scour the seas, attacking all privateers and pirates, destroying the hordes of assassins who plunder unarmed ships and murder our helpless fellow-creatures; we will pursue them from sea to sea. They have treasure, and caves, and islands gorged with plunder—we will take those from them, release their captives, and clear those waters of them—their spoils shall be our reward, and we will discover some fair island where we can make ourselves at home, and with no allegiance except to our own defiant flag, which shall be, as it has been, invincible."

All through this inspiring speech the boy-leader had been accompanied by a succession of ringing cheers.

At its close, the enthusiasm of the brave boy crew arose to such a pitch that they crowded around their beloved leader, and frantically kissing his hands, as if he had been a demigod, took oath to follow his daring leadership even to death.

And Ben Barnacle, lifting his deep voice among them, exclaimed:

"We will follow to the death—our leader shall be our king, our island home shall be our kingdom, where we will defy the power of the world."

Wild visions flashed dazzlingly before the eyes of our hero as his name rang aloft above the cheer of his stanch followers.

The noble grace of a youthful monarch beamed upon his frank countenance, and his devoted boy-crew, carried away by their enthusiasm, raised him to their shoulders and bore him thrice around the deck, amid such deafening cheers as were never before heard to resound across the mighty ocean.

CHAPTER XVI.

DUTCH PAUL, THE CAPTAIN OF THE "YELLOW VULTURE," WHO FIGHTS WITH LIQUID FIRE.

ON the evening of the succeeding day the lookout startled the watch on deck with the ever pleasure-inspiring cry:

"Sail, ho!"

The interest this news created was trebly intensified before Captain Tom and his officers had fairly got the vessel under range of their glasses, by the lookout repeating the cry:

"Where away?" shouted Tom.

"Off the stranger's lee-quarter, sir," answered the man aloft.

"I see her," cried Tom, "and I would swear I see smoke about the stranger's bows. What can it mean?"

Ben Barnacle, who had not spoken before now, uttered an exclamation:

"The larger vessel is firing into the smaller one—a pirate and its victim," he said, in grim anger.

In an instant the clear voice of Captain Tom rang out issuing orders to the men to spread all the canvas the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* could safely carry, and give chase.

As the gallant vessel sped grandly on, those on board were puzzled to observe long streaks of lurid light which seemed to form an arch from one vessel to the other, and then showed with meteoric brilliancy through the dense clouds of smoke.

The roaring of the guns was much louder, but less frequent.

The weaker vessel was yielding to the superior force of her enemy.

"The little one is beaten," Tom said.

"Yes," Harry Vere replied; "they have taken her. I hope we may be in time to do the same for them."

"See," cried Ben Barnacle, "they have fired the ship."

As if it had been flooded by instantaneous liquid fire, the smaller vessel, all in a moment, was ablaze from stem to stern; but her big opponent did not even then cease firing into her, and half-a-dozen shots brought her so low in the water that her speedy destruction by fire and leakage was certain.

Whether her crew and passengers had been removed, or were left to their terrible fate, it was impossible to conjecture; but a determined look settled on the faces of the excited boys as their ship began to forereach upon the victorious cruiser.

Having accomplished her swift, ruthless work, the strange vessel, deigning her pursuer no notice, now spread her sails, and shaped her course in another direction; but she went at an easy speed, as if glutted with the plunder of her prey, and at every leap of the ship the distance between them was lessened.

Now that they got closer the appearance and build of the enemy they were soon to encounter were the subject of curious observations.

She was a rather ungainly craft, heavily laden, and carrying an enormous weight of sail.

Her hull was low, and so oddly shaped that had her masts been cut down she would have looked like a huge tortoise upon the waters.

Her prow was sharp and like a beak in shape, and her figure-head was a monstrous vulture, painted yellow, and with its talons extended on deck as if to seize its prey.

Her decks were crowded with men, and the long lines of dark muzzles protruding from the portholes revealed how deadly was her armament.

The unfortunate vessel she had captured, and which was now blazing to the water's edge, had no more chance in an encounter with so formidable a foe than a dove had in contending with a vulture.

"Give her a gun," Tom said to Ben Barnacle; "she shows no colors, but that will bring her to."

The gun was fired.

Scarcely had the sullen roar died away, than as if by magic, the stranger's yards were stripped, and she lay to under bare poles, her motion as abruptly arrested as if a giant had held her in her course.

"The pirate means to fight," Harry Vere remarked. "I should like to send a shot that would sink her. Halloo! that's in reply to ours, I suppose. Not badly aimed, either. By Jove! I thought my head was carried away in splinters."

A puff of smoke had come from the stranger's hull, and, as Vere spoke, a big cannon-ball came tearing up the beams of the quarter-deck and knocked its way out at the other side.

Before Tom could reply, the ship's doctor, a gaunt, thin, cadaverous-faced vampire, with a sort of blood-letter face, crawled aft.

He had a case of instruments in his hand, and quietly squatting down on the splintered deck, he said, dryly:

"Ha! you've got a tough devil there, my young bloods. I shall have all my work cut out to stop all the veins they open before you are two minutes older. Here, Jacob, bring a basket for the legs and arms; we shall have plenty kicking about here presently."

Jacob, an ungainly, blubber-faced lout, with a hideous grin about his meaningless face, sidled up to his master, and began unrolling bandages as he sat beside him, and peering at the points of murderous-looking surgical instruments.

"Come, doctor," Tom said, quietly, "we can't have you on deck; you must do your work below."

"Ay—ay, my fine young skipper; they'll do work enough for me first up here," said the doctor, as he sidled away, followed by his assistant.

Doctor Shrike and his assistant, though so unprepossessing in their appearance, were very clever in their art.

Our hero knew their worth when the battle was over, and so he overlooked the peculiarities of the pair.

The stranger vessel had as yet shown no colors, and in silence her gun had been fired.

The men who had swarmed upon her decks were nowhere visible; but now a little ball was run up her halyards, and her flag unrolled.

A blood-red banner, with the device of a monstrous yellow vulture in the center.

Tom's own death banner had already been run up.

No sooner was the flag of the stranger seen than Zeila, who stood beside our hero, uttered a startled cry, and exclaimed:

"The Red Pirate! He fights with living fire. Keep your vessels apart, or we are all lost!"

As if reply to Zeila's warning words, a deep, hoarse laugh came from the stranger's deck, and a voice cried:

"Now, devils, give them their salute."

A swift, sudden and deadly broadside answered this command, and a fearful weight of metal pounded against the hull of the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*.

It was well that her sides were protected by a secret defense, or that well-directed volley would have sent her foundering to the bottom of the sea.

As it was, it did some damage, and our boy-adventurers' deck was strewn with the wounded before they well understood the sudden attack.

"Salute them in return," Tom cried. "Zeila, your place is below. Ben Barnacle, be ready with your boarders. Fire or no fire, we will not shirk the guns."

Zeila descended with a warning look on her beautiful face, and then began the swift and deadly cannonading, for which the boy-cruisers were already so famous, while their light vessel, under a heavy press of canvas, flew like a bird as she obeyed the maneuvers of her skillful commander.

Their telling fire, and the skill with which they evaded his deadliest volleys, evidently baffled the leader of the stranger pirates, whose deck was almost untenable.

In the hottest of the fight his deep voice resounded amid the din, as he gave some orders to his crew.

A moment after a blinding flash shot like lightning from his bows, and the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* was visited with a perfect hail of what seemed living fire.

For the moment, as the scathing balls of fire ran from stem to stern, and made a mimic hell of their decks, the boy-adventurers fled terror-stricken from their guns, as they strove to escape from the ravaging flames, but the angry tones of their dauntless leader recalled them to their duty.

"Back to your guns!" he cried, leaping amidst the fiercest raging fire. "See, I am unharmed. Fear not this harmless flame. Keep up your fire—deluge their decks with iron hail! Boarders, prepare; I alone will stay here while you take their ship!"

The flaming missiles, hissing furiously at our hero's feet, cast a lurid glow on his excited features.

He seemed more than mortal as he stood unscathed amidst the terrible element, and his followers, with a ready cheer, served their guns with deadly effect.

The pirate captain was paralyzed at receiving this storm of shot and grape from the vessel he had encircled with fire.

His fierce voice again rang out its commands, and with sudden swiftness his canvas fell, and the vessel drew away.

Tom, standing dauntless in his perilous position, looked through the smoke, and saw a burly-formed, stalwart man, with massive head set on immense shoulders, looking at him from his shattered decks.

He was dressed in rover's costume, a black, bushy beard encircled his chin, and his belt was crammed with huge pistols and short cutlasses.

"Ahoy, there!" he cried to Tom; "are you the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, and Captain Tom Drake?"

"We are," our hero replied, "and defy you still!"

"Then I fight you no longer. I'm sorry I've encountered you. Look to your hold, or the fire we've given you will blow your ship to pieces. I can give you no help—I've too much powder on board. We shan't fight if we meet again. You'll know me—I'm Dutch Paul, the captain of the *Yellow Vulture*."

He waved his hand and stepped down from the carronade on which he had been standing, and as his vessel answered her helm, and sheered off

from the scene of action, the boy cruisers saw, to their consternation, that the liquid fire running like mercury about their decks, had set her hold in a blaze.

The position of our hero and his boy crew was critical in the extreme.

The burning ingredient, whatever it was, seemed harmless so far as its flame was concerned, for Tom had thrust his hand into it without even being scorched; but it dropped a glowing mass, like red-hot mercury, and this ate its way through every beam and plank, and was lodged in all the crevices of the ship.

Prompt and collected in the deadliest peril, Tom sprang from his dangerous position, and issued his swift orders, himself aiding in the efforts to put out the fire.

In this they could succeed so far as the material of the ship was affected; but the blazing liquid proved to be inextinguishable, and burned as vividly under water as on deck.

Our hero's officers and our hero himself looked blankly in each other's faces.

The fire was traveling to the powder magazine.

One spark there, and the whole vessel, with its daring crew, would be blown to pieces.

Now that the echoes of the cannonade had died away, a strange silence reigned.

Noiselessly the fearless boys kept at their dangerous task of putting down the fire, while our hero, with a select party, saw to the powder magazine.

Their only chance of safety lay in keeping the blazing element from this place, and a direct approach of the flames was prevented by a barricade of iron plates, with which they shut off the place where the powder was stored.

The worst danger, however, lay in the fact that the insidious ingredient, working its way through the beams, might at any instant fall over their heads, and instantly compass their destruction.

With this peril before them, our hero and his chosen band set to work.

Their resolve was a desperate one.

Every barrel of the explosive material was hauled from the storing-place, and thrown singly into the sea.

The powder in bulk was well saturated by means of a hose kept playing upon it, and after an hour's imminent peril, any moment of which might have hurled every living soul into eternity, the last barrel of powder was—amidst a cheer that proclaimed the salvation of the ship—hoisted out at the lower port-holes.

The task of quelling the fire was comparatively trifling when this was accomplished, and the adventurous boys worked less quietly now that the imminence of their danger was past.

It took them a long time to extinguish every trace of the fire, and when this was effected the boy crew gathered around their idolized leader, to thank him for preserving their lives.

He was paler than he had ever been before.

He had fully realized their jeopardy, and though danger was his proper element, and defiance of death his kindred nature, the threatened destruction of his ship and crew had quelled the unusual fervor of his dauntless breast.

Every inch as brave and stanch a hero as ever, he looked sadly on the havoc around him, and his beautiful vessel, charred, riddled and splintered in all directions, seemed a perfect wreck.

And now, even though they had saved themselves from their threatened fate, their position was critical still.

At any moment they might meet one of their old enemies, and they had not an ounce of powder to serve their guns.

Tom looked somewhat ruefully at the begrimed and excited countenances of his devoted crew.

"We have been taught a lesson," he said; "one that we shall profit by. Our lamentable experience has left us in a sadly crippled state, but we must not despair. Our best plan will be to disguise the condition of our vessel, and under the flag of a trader, run into a safe port where we can lay in a stock of powder, and repair our serious damage. Till then we must not show fight. Let our bows be turned towards Barbadoes. Israel Shawm, our Jew dealer, will get us all we want when we arrive there, and we can take advantage of the occasion to convert some of our valuables into specie."

Repressing his feelings at the crippled condition of his graceful vessel, our hero saw all of his directions carried out, and then went to visit the wounded, while the ship's prow was shaped towards Barbadoes, the residence of their Jewish confederate, Israel Shawm, an individual to whom we must introduce our readers, as he plays no unimportant part in the fortunes of our boy adventurers.

CHAPTER XVII.

ISRAEL SHAWM—THE CHASE.

ISRAEL SHAWM was a wealthy Jew trader, who carried on an extensive business with the merchants and shippers.

His dwelling was situate close to the coast, where he had several wharves crammed with every description of merchandise.

He was not of the usual style of parchment-skinned, decrepit money-grubbers—on the contrary, he was tall and well fed, and affected some style in his attire and appearance.

His office was open to all comers, and here he sat, day after day, amidst piles of ledgers, papers, and samples of some of the things in which he traded.

He always had, too, large sums of money on the table before him, for he bought as well as sold; and then many skippers who parted with their wares to him were exceedingly anxious to get to sea again with their money.

Israel Shawm asked no questions when shiploads of valuable property were brought to his wharves, not even when the costly fabrics he purchased, in bales upon bales, were darkly stained—the stain, blood.

His dwelling-place was attached to his office premises.

Here he dwelt with his only daughter, Hester, a peerless girl, not yet eighteen, but of as perfect a mold of beauty as any of the famed dark-eyed Jewish maidens.

Another unusual trait in the character of the Jew trader was, that he lavished, with no niggard hand, the costliest gifts on his daughter.

She had the most superb jewels of any one on the island, and when she went out into society the rich dresses which set off her matchless form were the envy of the wives and daughters of the wealthiest.

"Hester, my child, take the glass, and tell me what you make out of that ship coming in—my eyes may deceive me, but it looks much like that ship of my fine young friend, Captain Tom Drake."

Hester paused abruptly in her work, the rich materials fell from her snow-white fingers, and her cheeks became crimson as the roses she was deftly embroidering.

She made her father no reply; but taking from its case a sliding telescope set in gold, scanned the distant view.

"'Tis he, father!" she cried, eagerly. "I can make out the trim of his vessel, and he floats the pale blue flag with the silver cross in the center—the one he told us his corsair captive worked for him."

"Ah! he is a fine lad—a brave one. He and I hash done good business together, and doubt not he comes with more heavy cargoes, for which we shall give him ten monish. Ah! he is a phenturesome poy."

"His career is indeed a dangerous one."

"Dansherous! why, mine Gott, ish it not one thousand pounds rewardsh on hish head! Dansherous! why, my girl, ish there one of those ships, vit de English flag flying, that would not blow down this place about our earsh to get at him and te rewardsh?"

"Surely, father, no one would betray him for that?"

"Eh, what?—what you say, my childsh?"

The old Jew looked at his daughter as if he could not credit his ears.

"Not petray him for the rewardsh? Why, my poor childsh! I shoodsh mesel! pe glad to have te monish, and might shell this shentleman, but he ish so good a customer of mine."

The dark eyes of the Jewish maiden flashed vividly when she heard the first part of her father's speech, and she seemed about to answer him angrily, but at its conclusion she dropped her eyelids over her brilliant orbs, and seated herself beside her father to await the coming of the expected visitor.

Our hero's ship came gallantly into the bay, and cast anchor in the offing outside the bar.

Her sails were trimmed, and the blue banner with its cross floated from her peak.

Besides this, he displayed the Brazilian colors, and had the name of *Santa Anna* in gilt letters over the true name of his ship.

Israel Shwam could distinguish Tom's figure seated at the stern long before the boat reached the landing-place, and an avaricious leersparkled in his bleared, sunken eyes.

"Alone," muttered the Jew, as if speaking his thoughts aloud. "Ah, how easly it woodt pe to take him now! Te shentlemansh is prave, but he ish not discreetsh; if it was a thousand pohndsh on my head, I woodt not come alone—no—no—I woodt not, on my shoul."

The lustrous eyes of his peerless daughter were fixed upon him with a strange, stealthy look when he uplifted his gaze.

For the first time in his life the rapacious Israelite felt a sinister thrill as he encountered his daughter's fascinating glance.

He looked more keenly at her, but the moment her eyes met his, hers was veiled by their snowy lids, and he could glean nothing of what was passing in her mind.

In a few minutes a colored domestic announced the expected arrival, and immediately afterwards our hero entered the room, and formally greeting the old Jew, gallantly bowed to the Jewish maiden.

"Ah, captainsh, glad to see you!" the old Jew cried. "Hester, my child, place a chair, and some wine—our famous wine—for the captainsh—he—he—he!—eh?"

Captain Tom, with an easy grace, reached a chair for himself, and with a light compliment to Hester, seated himself at the table with the Jew.

"Well, my tear young friendsh," began the hypocritical old trader, "you have had fine voyages—been cruising round te world mit all te men-of-war at your heels. Hal! we've heard of your pranksh, captainsh. Mine Gott, but you are a gallant shentlemansh! But how do you give them te slip, eh? You must have te nine lives, eh, my tear captainsh? he—he!—eh?"

Tom merely bowed to this speech, and the bright-eyed Jewess, stealing a quick glance at his handsome, bronzed face, placed the wine and glasses before them.

It was a choice wine, and as she poured it from the richly-cut crystal decanter into the veined Venetian glasses, the ruby liquid sparkled lusciously, and seemed to excite a keener gleam in the Israelite's eyes.

"We have two glasses only," Tom said, as the soft white arm of the Jewish maiden almost touched his shoulder; "has our fair Hebe forgotten herself?"

"She dush not drink te wine," the Jew began. "She ish a goodt girl, and has not te taste for liquors."

"Then must I instruct this houri in the forbidden drink. No protests, Israel Shawm—I insist; a glass for herself, if she only moistens her lips. By Heaven! it would be sacrilege to drink in such presence and forget the peerless enchantress of your abode!"

The Jew's thin lips mumbled dryly—he did not relish our hero's freedom, but he thought it best to disguise his real feelings, and at a nod from him, Hester brought herself a glass.

"You will have your way, captainsh; yesh, you musht always have your way. Te poor Jew can say nothing while you make free in hish house."

"Pardon me. I pledge your daughter's health. May her eyes never be less bright, her cheeks less red, her heart more sad, than I would make them."

He arose and drained his glass.

Hester scarcely sipped hers, but her large eyes shone lustrously as she drank in his words, and it was almost with a sigh, as she placed the wine down, that she obeyed her father's gesture and left the room.

"And now, my tear poy, let us te bishness," the Jew exclaimed; "but I hope it ish not much monish you want. I am not so rich as I wash—heavy losses, my tear captainsh."

"Save your breath, old huckster," Tom replied, refilling his glass. "I shall not take your cash. The goods I wish you to have I can exchange for an article I require, and that is some of the excellent powder you are in the habit of supplying the French ships with, without the permission of your Government."

The Jew's face went ashy pale, and his lips dried like withered sticks.

He did not think his infamous traffickings with the enemies of the English government were known.

His teeth chattered as he thought of his certain fate should he be betrayed.

"Py te Got of Abraham, captainsh!" he mumbled, "I am not able to guess what you mean—I have not sell—"

Tom interrupted him.

"Like all your race, you have a ready habit of lying; the devil who is at your elbow in your huckstering dealings, is always prepared. I suppose, to help you when you want him. Don't be afraid, Isaael, I am not going to betray you, but I want a full quantity of powder. By the way, this wine is excellent; 'tis rare enough to intoxicate the soul of a prophet."

The Jew trader had by this time recovered a little from the effect of his fright, and forcing a smile to his shriveled lips, he said:

"It ish rare wine—rare as te wine you had from te corsair cruiser. Ash much ash you like you shall have of it for your ship; you will not mind te price—it is high, but te wine ish goot; and te powder, you shall have it—it ish for your ship?"

"Well, yes; I want it sent aboard."

"Smuggled aboard you must have it. Te au—"

thorities here are phery sharp, and te risk makes the bargain dearer."

"Very sharp, indeed," laughed Tom, "when half-a-dozen French ships are supplied with powder from your wharves. No—no, Israel, you must get it aboard free of risk, and then you can take seven bales of this to pay you."

He placed a sample of rich silk before the Jew. Avaricious and greedily as the lying old huckster was he could not cavil at the liberal offer of repayment.

His cunning eyes glistened as he saw the quality of the silk, and pawing it with his shriveled hands, he said:

"All like thish, captainsh, the sheven pales?"

"All—are you satisfied?"

"You are generoush, captainsh, phery generoush; but then te risk ish great. Te silk ish goodt. Have you many more pales besides?"

"I have seven bales for you, Israel Shawm, and the rest of my cargo you may guess at as much as you please."

A sinister gleam shone in the Jew trader's eye as he put the question.

Tom's ready reply baffled his curiosity, however, and the gloom died away again.

"And now, captainsh," he exclaimed, after the arrangement of their bargain had been concluded "I have a proposition to make, and if you will agree you shall make monish enough to fill your ship."

"A rich venture—what is its nature?"

"Te plack man, captainsh—te nigger. I have a treaty with a king on te coast of Africa. He shall give you te placks, and you shall take them where it will be safe, and I will give you a mint of money for te run. You can do it well, captainsh; you have a fine ship, and she ish swift as a pird, and you can fight—"

A deep flush had suffused our hero's bronzed features as the rescally Jew began his infamous offer; now he arose, and bringing his clenched hand heavily down on the table, faced the cringing speaker.

"No more!" he cried. "Think you I would sully my ship with such traffic? Think you I could tread her white deck, if her holds were crammed with a suffocating mass of humanity, brutally torn from their homes, crowded, bruised and bleeding, with irons fastening into their gashed bodies, and the iron of slavery doomed to eat into their souls? You mistake me, gray old blood-sucker. Single out another for your infamous traffic in the blood and flesh of your fellow man; but let me cross the track of one such ship, and I will send crew, vessel and all, with its load of suffering wretches, to the depths of the sea!"

The force of Tom's hand striking the table had hurled one of the glasses, with its measure of luscious wine, into Israel's lap, and he seemed anticipating to be himself hurled to the ground.

"Got of Abraham!" he cried, aghast. "I thought you was a pirate captainsh, and would not mindsh—"

"I am called pirate, driveling old huckster, because I fight for my independence. It is true, too, that I take spoils at sea, but I plunder only those who have stolen amid bloodshed their costly gains. I know it is no legal crime, this traffic in helpless humanity; but to me it is an abhorrent trade of infamy, and that act is merciful which does as I would do—free the penned wretches from their misery by sending them to a swift, watery grave. Therefore, Israel Shawm, look out. I have a keen scent, and if one of these blood-traffickers crosses my track—a shot from my ship straight through her hull—the rest you understand. And now, farewell! I shall not visit you again this voyage. Fulfill your compact—I will not fail in mine."

Saying this, our hero took up his gold-laced hat, and left the apartment.

Hester encountered him as he left the threshold.

Her face was blanched, and a wild look shone in her dark eyes.

"You have angered my father," she said, in a low whisper; "be on your guard."

"Ha!" Tom cried, catching her wrist.

Hester released her hand quickly, and stepped back.

Her quick hearing had detected her father's footstep, and she retreated as the door opened and the knavish face of the merchant peered forth.

But the warning look was still in her bright eyes.

"Captainsh," Israel Shawm came forth, his voice whining, his frame obsequiously bowed, "I have repented that I made te offer. I shall not deal in thish trade, and I shall still call you mine goodt friendsh."

Tom's frank eyes revealed his discredit of the Jew's assertion.

He waved his hand, and passed from the house.

At the doorway he paused, and bowed gracefully to the dark-eyed Jewess.

Then sticking his cocked hat jauntily on his head, he gave the Jew trader an incredulous look, and with a mocking laugh, departed.

No sooner had the door closed behind him than Israel Shawm, whose visage was ashy pale and clammy, strutted up to it, and shaking his palsied hand after our hero, cried, huskily:

"My curses wither you, dog of a birate! Ah, I will stop your fine career. So you will sink my ships. Ah, captainsh, that was a bad threat, a phery bad threat, with a thousand poundsh reward on your headsh."

"Father—father!" Hester cried, moving towards him, "you would not betray him?"

"My curses on you, too, child of mine, if you have a word to say to him! Perditionsh! did he not take you by the handsh? What had he to do vit te color of your cheeks, and te brightness of your eyes? A curse on his blood and flesh, I say!"

The Jew's whole frame quivered with passion. He tottered back to his room, and still mumbling his palsied curses on our hero's head—closed the door behind him.

An hour afterwards his bell summoned his daughter.

Israel Shawm held a sealed letter in his shaking hand.

"Shend Diego here. I want him to go to te commandantsh vit this letter."

Hester sighed as she obeyed his orders.

She guessed at the purport of that missive; but nothing was to be gained by intercepting her father's messenger.

Half an hour had not elapsed when the British commandant arrived, and was ushered into the presence of the Jew, by whom he was directed to take a seat.

The commandant was a quiet-featured, elderly Englishman.

He was on slightly intimate terms with Israel Shawm, who found it his best policy to keep up good acquaintance on the island, that his nefarious practices might be less likely to be suspected.

The commandant after he had formally greeted him, began the conversation.

"I duly received your note, Mr. Shawm, and am here, all eagerness, as you may guess, to learn what important communication you have to lay before me."

"My good friendsh, you shall hear quickly. You shall have heard of one pirate poy, Captainsh Tom Drake?"

"Of course I have. You do not mean to say you know anything of him?"

"Suppose I do, my good friendsh? Suppose I knew where you can send a shipsh to take him?"

"Where—where, my dear Mr. Shawm? This is really important. I will take instant measures—"

"No—no; you will alarmish te island, and this pirate captainsh ish like te tevil himself in getting away. No—no! suppose this boy captainsh come to me, and say I must shend him a cargo of powdersh; suppose I send in te barrels and suppose your shipsh go after his shipsh, and when he gets ready to fight, he findsh the powdersh no powdersh at all, and shall not be able to load his guns, while you blow his ship up, and take him your prisoner."

The commandant did not quite understand the Jew trader's words; but a more precise explanation sharpened his wits, and in high glee he took his departure, having warmly thanked the Jew for putting the chance of promotion in his way.

"You will have the shipsh ready by night-fall?" the Israelite said, bowing him to the door.

"Ready and armed to the teeth."

"And te tousand poundsh?"

"Shall be yours. The honor of his capture will be enough for me."

Hester heard those last words as she sat, pale and motionless as a statue, in her own room, the door of which being open, allowed her to overhear what the commandant said.

Her father did not even give her a thought. He shuffled back to his office, and seating himself by the window, peered through his spectacles at Tom's graceful ship.

"I could have taken her now," he mumbled; "but then I shoold not get my pales of silk, and it will be more bettersh to play the tricksh I will play him. Ah, py my soul, he shall pay wit his life!"

His skinny fingers twined themselves restlessly, and presently his thoughts took another turn.

"If it shoold fail," he mumbled; "but no, that ish impossible—impossible!"

An uneasy feeling, nevertheless, marred his gleeful anticipations; an unpleasant vision arose before his eyes—the vision of the fiery boy-cruiser, escaped from the snare and confronting him in hot fury—eager to crush his life out.

He shook off the feeling, and persuaded himself that his treachery could not fail.

It was a dark when a lighter, laden to the edge with what seemed barrels of pork, lay at Israel's wharf ready to depart.

The old trader himself stood peering from the window, chuckling as he saw the cargo embarked.

The lighter was just about to move off, when a cloaked female a lady, evidently, though disguised—walked hastily up to the quay, and stepping into a boat, was rowed from the wharf.

The gathering gloom had hidden the lighter from the Jew trader's sight, when a boat was brought alongside it, and the lady, leaning towards the nearest man, addressed him in a low tone by name.

The man started, and bowed respectfully.

The lady's gloved hand was extended; a little note was held between her fingers.

A few words in a low tone, the man took the letter, the lady drew her veil closer about her form, the lighter again went on its way, and the boat was rowed back to the quay.

Softly as the lady had spoken, another man on board the lighter had heard the words and recognized the voice.

He knew that it was his master's daughter, and overheard when she charged her messenger to deliver the letter without fail.

He was a fellow of an evil and suspicious mind; he watched where his companion put the letter, and before they were much further on their way had dexterously purloined it.

Bending low down so as to be unseen and to get the reflected light of the waters, he read the superscription of the letter.

It was simply addressed to "The Captain."

The man's active fingers noiselessly opened it, and he read the words intended for our hero—words which the peerless Jewess had hastily penned to put him on his guard.

"Fly, you are sold! the blood-money has caused your betrayal. At nightfall you will be pursued. Beware! you are taking an enemy on board instead of a friend!"

The letter was written on a double sheet of paper, and the man who had deciphered its message tore off the written half and concealed it inside his shirt; the other half he folded neatly as it had been before, and restored it to the open pocket whence he had abstracted it.

Five bells had just struck on board our hero's ship when the lighter grated its side.

The work of unloading the barrels was soon accomplished, and the bales of silk transferred to their place.

Just as the lighter was leaving, the man, in obedience to the instructions of his young mistress, handed the letter to one of Tom's boy-crew.

Little Kanak, who was at the gangway, snatched the missive and ran with it to his youthful master, who was superintending the stowage of the powder.

Admiral Tom opened the letter, and looked curiously at the blank sheet of paper.

He was accustomed to cyphers and secret writing of all kinds; but every device was tried in vain to bring any trace of ink or pencil marks on the unsoiled sheet.

"Strange!" he mused; "it is a female's hand—the writing, I could almost swear, of the Jew trader's daughter. Something is wrong. Stop that lighter; we will question the men."

The lighter paid no attention to the summons to return, and the darkness rendered the lowering of a boat useless.

So our hero, who regarded the blank sheet as a warning, ordered the anchor to be quietly weighed, and stood out to sea.

They sailed under easy pressure of canvas till daybreak, when two large war-vessels were discovered full on their track, hoisting signals for them to lay to—signals of which the boy-buccaneers took no notice, till a gun was fired from the nearest war-ship and the spread of canvas told them that they were hotly pursued.

Our hero was standing on the deck with Ben Barnacle and his boy-officers, when the shot was hurled across his bows, and reddening to the temples, he ordered the decks to be cleared for action, intending to give his pursuers a sample of his mettle before taking leave of them.

A sudden cry from Bob Hauler, who came rushing hurriedly from the magazine, was the first means of discovering to him how he had been tricked by the Jew.

Bob Hauler's honest face was aghast with mingled dismay and chagrin.

"We're cheated, sir!" he cried to his young chieftain; "the powder's a trick; you can fire a red-hot shot into it without doing any mischief."

"Eh!" Tom exclaimed angrily, as he walked

down to the magazine. "If he has tricked me he shall pay dearly."

"It's true enough, sir; he's dusted a cargo of charcoal-dust with gunpowder, and put powder on the top, but there ain't enough in the whole batch to charge a broadside."

A hasty inspection revealed to our hero the Jew's knavish trick. He had filled the barrels with finely-powdered charcoal, with which a little gunpowder was intermixed.

The brow of Captain Tom grew dark; his eyes blazed with fierce anger.

"Knock in every cask-head!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps we can find enough powder for a broadside!"

Ben Barnacle respectfully saluted his youthful leader, as he remarked:

"It would be hazardous, sir, engaging them, if we even found so much as that."

"Do not fear me, Ben; I am not so reckless of the lives of my gallant band. No, I do not wish to fight these vessels; but I should like to double on them, and, with one broadside, blow that knavish Jew-trickster's house about his ears."

"We ain't got enough for a couple of guns," Bob Hauler said, ruefully. "The rubbish is only fit to pitch overboard, except one cask, which I should like to cram down that thievish Jew's throat—staves, charcoal-dust, and all, and make him swallow every grain, if it took him a week to make the meal."

Bob Hauler viciously rammed his brawny arm into the worthless mass, and clenched a handful as if it were the old Jew's windpipe.

"We must make a couple of fools of these ships," Tom observed, as he ascended to the deck. "They are evidently aware of our predicament, and are doubtless enjoying the anticipation of an easy capture. They shall have a morning's amusement for their pains."

On deck they had not been idle. More sails had been crowded aloft, in order to increase the distance between them and their pursuers.

As Captain Tom reached the quarter-deck, a simultaneous report came from the two vessels, which were now close alongside, and had given this imperative summons for the boy-buccaneers to yield.

Our hero quietly issued his orders to his crew.

The decks were cleared, their sails trimmed, and every appearance of preparation for battle made—maneuvers which easily misled the pursuing ships, whose commanders, aware of the empty condition of Tom's magazine—for the old Jew had rightly divined that they had no powder on board, and from the reports of the charred state of the decks and some of the masts, guessed the cause—imagined that this was only an empty demonstration before their surrender—and took in nearly all their canvas, in order to show how well they were prepared for a desperate conflict.

The instant this movement checked their speed they had the mortification of seeing the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* spread all her sails with magical celerity and begin one of the daring runs for which she was already famous.

Determined not to be baffled, the commanders gave a hurried order to fire their broadsides at the hull of the saucy runaway.

The word "fire" rang over the billows—the men flew to their quarters—the guns were thrust out—and amid the deafening roar the iron missiles sped across the sea.

Every one paused after the discharge and looked to see the cruiser ship annihilated; but when the smoke cleared away it showed them, to their surprise and chagrin, the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* unharmed, and literally dancing over the sparkling waves.

"Now," Tom cried, his dark-brown eyes sparkling with excitement, "shake out a reef or two more. If they pursue us we'll lead them such a distance that they will as lief think of chasing the church-yard will-o'-the-wisp as of tracking us again."

More sails were spread, and the speed of the ship increased. The British vessels, too, got up an extra display of canvas; but our hero's ship soon began perceptibly to recede, and, though the chase was hot, and they did their best by an occasional gun to bring them to, the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* sped slowly out of sight, and by nightfall all pursuit of her was hopeless.

Tom remained on deck all that night.

Their position was critical. Powerless to fire a shot, they had no chance except by boarding, and their vessel, securely as it was protected, might be crippled and themselves shot down before they could get a chance of using their cutlasses and pikes.

And if a persistent fate menaced him with extra perils, now that he was less able to meet them, the gray daylight showed him another vessel hanging on his track.

She was some leagues in the rear, and it was a long time since he had seen her; but a careful

survey through his glass convinced him that she was their old pursuer, the *Arethusa*, the ship upon whose deck he had taken his first lessons in sea life, under Captain Parker and his old enemy, Sanderson.

On board the frigate they were not able to make out the character of ship they pursued; but from her manner of keeping before the wind, their suspicions were aroused, and at the risk of suffering some serious casualty, Captain Parker had every stitch of canvas crowded on that the vessel would bear, and with her powerful masts straining like reeds, the frigate made such good headway that the ship of our boy-adventurers was never out of sight until towards dark, when she began imperceptibly to grow less, and at last only her hull, like a small speck, could be discovered.

Captain Parker strained his eyesight until the glass was of no further use to him, when, with a vexatious exclamation, he handed the telescope to his lieutenant, and wiped the moisture from his aching eyes.

"Can you make her out now, Mr. Burley?"

"No, sir; she has disappeared, masts and all."

"Curse her—after a whole day's chase!"

"I think, sir, it must have been that specter-ship, the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*. If it was, and they have that young devil, Tom Drake, on board, we may whistle our ears off before we take her."

"I'll take her, by Heavens!" was the stern and determined answer; and the boatswain's whistle called all hands up to lay out more sail.

How well the brave fellow kept his word can be imagined, for when the morning broke and Captain Tom came on deck, he beheld his implacable foe still on his track.

"We must try the topsails," he said, thoughtfully.

"I fear our rigging aloft, sir, is not as taut as it should be. That Dutch fiend's hellish liquid fire has done more damage than we have had opportunity to repair," said Ben Barnacle.

"We must risk it, Ben; we are in no condition to fight that frigate without ammunition—it is a question of two evils."

Ben saluted, and walked forward to see that his young chief's wishes were carried out.

More sail was crowded on, and the topmasts groaned beneath the additional weight. A fresh breeze had sprung up, and would have enabled the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* to show a clean pair of heels, had not the very means our hero had used to elude his powerful antagonist proved fatal.

One of the masts had been so severely charred during the time that the fire raged on board that though every means had been used to render it safe, the stiffening breeze and the weight of the canvas brought it down about their ears with a report that brought all hands on deck.

It caused a panic; even Ben Barnacle's swarthy face paled, but it was in these moments of dire peril that our hero showed that cool foresight and administrative ability that made him the successful commander that he was.

"We will not make any effort to run," he said, "or let the enemy think we are attempting to get away from them; we must change our tactics. Haul our flag down—if I mistake not we are near the French coast."

"You will sail under your adopted colors. The American—"

"No; I have another plan, and one you cannot fail to appreciate, though I will fight my ship while a plank holds, in the cause of American independence. I am no lover of the French; besides, if we succeed we shall strike the British where they will feel it most bitterly—their pride. Run up Norwegian colors."

Wondering what daring plan his young leader had on hand, but with too much confidence in him to ask now, Barnacle did as he was bid.

At the same moment a dozen men slipped over the vessel's sides, and painted out the broad white ribbon that so helped to show the beautiful run of the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, and thus her appearance was so altered that even her own men would not have known her from the shore.

"I thought so," exclaimed Captain Tom, presently, "we are safe. Look."

A gladsome sight indeed. They were nearing the French coast, and before them loomed a portion of a powerful fleet of French ships of war, all standing gaily out to sea.

Tom headed his ship straight for these, and seeing by the flag which was the admiral's ship, ran close in, and was glad to see a signal from the French three-decker.

He was intensely grateful when he beheld the flagship lay-to and signal for him to go aboard.

The interview was not long one. Tom's information covering the distant frigate put the Frenchmen on the move, and the whole fleet tried to outvie each other in coming up with the *Arethusa*.

And no wonder; if ever an unfortunate people

built fleets for another peoples' sailors to "knock into cocked hats," the French did in those days, and I doubt not but even in these days the Anglo-Saxon, whether hailing from this side of the Atlantic or the other, would be more than a match for the Latins in naval warfare.

Tom gained some valuable information, as you shall learn, before he rejoined his crew, and beckoned Harry Vere and Ben Barnacle to his cabin below.

"Now, Ben and Vere," he said, aglow with some project. "I must premise my remarks by stating that I mean to capture the Fortress Renauf."

Ben Barnacle could only look thoughtfully into our hero's face. Zeila, who occupied her usual place at our hero's feet, started. Ben spoke.

"Reckless and impossible as such an undertaking may appear," he said, "to capture the fortress, though the French do brag so much about it, might not be so difficult if we had enough powder; but in our present crippled state we can have no hope of success."

Captain Tom smiled.

"Strange as it may appear," he observed, quietly, "I propose taking the fortress without the expenditure of an ounce of powder and shot—without calling on my rash lieutenant here to lead his boarders against an impregnable wall. I purpose effecting its capture by the new art—Diplomacy."

Ben Barnacle looked grave as before.

Harry Vere whistled.

Zeila, who had taken her usual resting-place on a cushion at our hero's feet, gazed wonderingly up in his handsome countenance.

"You shall hear my plans," Tom said. "Our friend, the admiral of that portion of the French fleet we have just parted from, was kind enough not only to impart much useful information, but to direct me where we could repair, and even gave me a letter of introduction to certain individuals living within shelter of this famous fort. It happened that when he gave me his letters, a packet lying open on the table, and which I had before noticed, happened to slip into my pocket; it is from the French minister; here is his signature—a signature which I have faithfully copied and attached to a document empowering the commandant of this fortress to deliver up such stores as I, Admiral Duquesne, of the glorious navy of France, may require. Armed with this document, I shall enter the fortress alone, and state my mission to the commandant, and await the result."

Ben Barnacle looked with admiring pride in the fearless countenance of the daring chief, while Harry Vere uttered an excited cry of delight.

Zeila was silent and sadly thoughtful.

"It is possible," our hero continued, "that the commandant may refuse to believe in the genuineness of the orders, and decline to deliver up the stores, in which case I shall simply, in the Republic's name, order his own men to place him under arrest, as an enemy to his country; the superior command would be vested in me, then." The boy's eyes blazed with enthusiasm. "Our own free flag shall float above the walls of the fortress."

"Magnificent!" cried Harry Vere; "and success depends entirely upon you being quite alone."

"Entirely," Tom answered. "Ben Barnacle, the ship will be in your charge from now. I shall not attempt the affair until we have refitted, which will be in about five days. But I must not be seen on board. To you, Vere, I leave the task of superintending the expedition to land and take the stores. Zeila I leave in the care of all my faithful band. I shall enter the fortress precisely at eleven on the fifth day from this; in less than two hours either you will receive the signal to land, or I shall have failed. Should that last occur, Ben, forget not that the ship is yours."

Ben sprang up—a tear glistened in his fine dark eye.

"Mine!" he cried, in a husky voice. "I would make it my tomb—my funeral pyre! No, no, Ben Barnacle takes no command when he loses his leader—he will avenge him and die."

The gallant-hearted fellow seized Tom's hands in his grasp, and pressed them convulsively to his heart.

"God, who alone reads our hearts," he cried, "knows the great love I bear you; He knows, too, I could not survive if you were lost to me."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALONE IN THE FORTRESS—TOM'S DARING RUSE BY WHICH HE CONQUERS THE COMMANDANT AND COMMANDS THE GARRISON.

AT precisely 11 o'clock on the morning of the fifth day, Captain Tom Drake presented himself at the gates of the Fortress Renauf.

He was attired in the uniform of an admiral of the French Republic. The tricolor was in his hat,

the Democratic sash around his waist, and a dress sword at his side.

He wore big boots, as if he had come a journey; a wig of long hair Frenchified his appearance, and for the rest, he trusted to his proficiency in the French language, his coolness, and the bold intrepidity which he knew would not desert him.

The diligence in which he had been driven up to the fortress was conspicuously dusty; the two men outside were the perfection of official menials.

The gates were opened in obedience to our hero's summons; he passed in, and was ushered into the fortress.

Then the heavy gates closed, and he stood alone in the stronghold of the enemy—perhaps never to go forth from its walls alive.

Still, so constitutionally brave was he that not even a thrill quickened his pulsation.

With genial but decided dignity he stalked across the courtyard, and was received at the entrance by the sergeant on duty, who, deferentially recognizing his rank, conducted him inside.

"Usher me into the presence of Monsieur le Commandant," said Captain Tom, "or state to him that Admiral Duquesne, with letters from the chief of our great Republic, desires audience of him."

The sergeant bowed and left him.

He returned almost immediately, and led the way to the commandant's room.

The commandant, however, had come forth to receive his visitor.

He was a quiet-looking, undignified man, wearing a pair of spectacles, which he seemed to require more from some defect in his sight than from his age.

He was dressed in the republican garb, and had the appearance of a placid, but shrewd and obstinate man—not over venturesome, not particularly active, but one who may safely be entrusted with any responsibility.

"I have the honor," our hero said, in capital French, when he and the commandant had saluted each other, "of addressing Monsieur Citizen le Maitre, commandant of the Fortress Renauf?"

The commandant bowed.

"It is the will of the chief of our great Republic," Tom continued, following the commandant into his apartment, "that I should lay before Monsieur le Commandant, firstly, this packet, which I have now the honor to hand to him; and afterwards this other, which I detain until you shall have acknowledged the first."

He handed a packet, which the commandant, after respectfully saluting the seal of the great republic (which Tom had capitally forged), broke open, as he observed:

"Monsieur the Admiral will please be seated."

"With due thanks, monsieur, I would prefer to be allowed to stand."

The commandant carefully read the document. Every word he examined, cautiously scrutinizing the various signatures.

Without a movement of his countenance, our hero waited in an attitude of dignified composure.

The forged document was an order for him to answer, without reserve, all questions of his visitor, to conduct Tom whithersoever he desired to go within the fortress, to attend reverently to the instructions contained in the other package.

The commandant perused the paper twice before he spoke.

"Monsieur the Admiral will understand that I am at his service and that of the great republic."

Our hero bowed, and without altering his position, put a series of questions, which the commandant politely answered.

Tom then desired to be conducted to the storerooms and magazine.

If the commandant felt any hesitation he did not show it, but silently led the way, offering no remark unless addressed by his visitor.

At the entrance to the magazine he paused.

"Monsieur the Admiral will pardon me, but it is the order of the chief that none shall enter the magazine of a fortress armed save the commandant."

"Monsieur must pardon my neglect of the orders," our hero observed, taking off his sword and placing it on the stones outside.

The commandant seemed better satisfied at this, but it was plainly evident that, like all good servants of the Republic, he was suspicious and exacting.

Still entertaining his reserve, he unlocked the heavy door, and they entered the magazine.

A good deal of powder was stored here; there were weapons and munitions of war of all descriptions besides.

The place was beneath the fortress, and admitted no light.

The covered lantern which the commandant had brought only barely lighted up the place, but it

enabled our hero to see that all he required was within his reach.

The commandant spoke.

"Monsieur the Admiral is satisfied with his inspection?"

"Perfectly. It will be my pleasing duty to report favorably of what I have seen. The Republic may be satisfied that it has a good servant in Monsieur le Maitre."

The commandant bowed, and our hero took the second packet from his breast.

His most difficult part was now to come.

"I have now the honor to convey my second instructions, to which I am charged to add verbal explanations. Monsieur will please read."

He handed him the second packet—the commandant saluted the seal and superscription as before, and began slowly to read.

Before he had finished, he started and turned pale, then looked up at his visitor's face.

Our hero remained immovable.

"Monsieur is aware of the nature of the dispatch?"

"To the letter."

"Is Monsieur prepared to explain the reason of these extraordinary instructions?"

"The great Republic, of which we are humble citizens," Tom replied impressively, "issues not explanations, but orders."

The commandant mused.

"This dispatch commands me to give up my stores and ammunition. My fort would be defenseless."

Our hero shrugged his shoulders.

"Monsieur has seen a vessel lying outside?" he asked.

The commandant bowed.

"She has seemed a Norwegian sloop. She is not. Her nationality is French. She is armed to the teeth, but ill-supplied with powder. It is the order of the chief of the Republic that this magazine furnish her. Monsieur will not forget that the fortress he commands has the reputation of being impregnable. For eight-and-forty hours it will be defenseless. But who will learn the secret? Monsieur has his instructions. It is my duty to see to the requirements of this vessel, for the destination of which I have secret instructions. If Monsieur hesitates, it will be my duty to command."

The features of the commandant flushed.

"Monsieur," he said, angrily, "when the republic honored me with the command of this fortress, it instructed me to surrender to no one its stores or defense. Monsieur talks of command. Does he not see that with a touch I could blow up the stores from beneath his feet—the walls about his ears?"

"Citizen le Maitre," Tom said, "the instructions I have handed you authorize no such waste of useful munitions of war."

The commandant looked at the speaker.

Our hero's cool way of speaking of being blown up in the air surprised him.

He could not fairly suspect him, and yet he could not reconcile himself to the idea of stripping the fortress.

"Monsieur will not forget," he exclaimed, "that a Frenchman's honor is sacred. The insult he has offered me must receive satisfaction. Monsieur has no weapon. I spare him a sword—let him use it."

He placed the packets in his breast, the lantern on a barrel of powder, and kicked a sword towards Tom's feet, at the same time drawing his own weapon from its scabbard.

Our hero did not stir.

"Monsieur forgets," he said, quietly, "that my instructions have to be carried out before I can engage in any private matters."

"Are you a coward?"

"Monsieur speaks like a traitor, and not like a soldier of the Republic, whose duty is to sink his private wishes and serve his country."

The commandant's face was white with passion.

"Monsieur can fight," he cried. "Should he kill me, he can satisfy the garrison of the genuine nature that of his instructions; should I kill him, I shall act up to my first orders. Monsieur forgets that his dispatches have omitted to cancel my first instructions, and that one document he has brought commands me to conduct him within the fort, but does not specify that he is to leave it again. Monsieur forgets, too, that under his feet are deep dungeons, where I could place him by the uplifting of a finger. He had better, then, take up a sword."

The critical moment had arrived—the moment on which his fate depended.

All rested now on the result of his abrupt appeal to the garrison.

He had failed with the commandant, whose staunch and dogged devotion to his cause made him prefer death rather than even run the risk of betraying the charge intrusted to him.

Our hero was not without admiration for the

determined pluck of the eccentric commandant, but the emergency of his position demanded prompt and effective action.

He might have chosen the course then offered him, of running the devoted Republican through the body.

Alone as they were, he could easily have done so, but apart from his unwillingness to shed the blood of a brave and true man, such a proceeding might only have increased his difficulties.

"Citizen le Maitre," he said, "I do not pick up that sword because I am not a traitor to my cause as you are."

He stepped back quickly and thrust open the door.

"Ho! there! Soldiers of the Republic, enter. Treachery is in your midst! Advance, before your magazine is given to the enemy, and your country betrayed! Advance! I hold the traitor here, and only over my body shall he pass!"

The commandant made a rush at Tom as his loud tones rang along the corridor, but our hero, by a gesture that awed him with his dignity, caused him to pause, amazed and dumbfounded, and while he hesitated, the soldiers—who had hastily snatched up their muskets—rushed into the magazine.

"Citizen soldiers," cried Tom Drake, "in the name of the Republic, I denounce this traitor! Arrest him; let the officer of the guard be called, that this traitor may be searched, and all treasonable papers taken from him!"

The commandant was so dumbfounded that he could not speak.

The soldiers, looking from the erect, dignified figure of Captain Tom to the scared, half-paralyzed attitude of the commandant, had no doubt that he was detected in some traitorous intrigue, and in a trice he was seized and disarmed.

When the officer of the guard came, our hero placed in his hands the papers he had taken from the commandant's breast.

"Citizen soldiers," he exclaimed, "these are dispatches of our glorious Republic, which he has dared to repudiate, and, besides, he has long been among the suspected and denounced. Convey him to the dungeon beneath the magazine. He will there await the trial of a traitor."

If the men had been at all inclined to hesitate, our hero's commanding bearing would have decided them.

As it was, appearances were so against this late commandant, and the rank of our hero appeared to be so great, that the unfortunate commandant was not allowed to speak; the breath was jerked out of him as he was dragged along.

He was loaded with chains and conveyed to the dark, noisome dungeons under ground, where he was left in darkness and solitude, to ponder on the unexpected fate that had converted him from a trusted and honored citizen and officer into a denounced, manacled captive awaiting an ignominious doom.

The high-handed manner in which Captain Tom had carried matters, left him so far successful in his daring scheme—he had passed through the most imminent moment, for it was the hazard of a die whether the commandant might not have had sufficient nerve to denounce him as a traitor and order him to be shot where he stood.

Now he stood master of the fortress, and though a hundred perils yet menaced him, he trusted to his consummate hardihood to get him safely through the remainder of his enterprise.

When the commandant had been safely got out of the way, he told the officer to lock up the magazine and accompany him to the casement of the fort, from which, with proudly-beating heart, he signalled his sloop to send the boat ashore.

How gladly was the signal received by those on board!

A wild, thrilling cheer ran along the vessel's decks, and the boy-buccaniers, burning with enthusiasm to share the fortunes of their leader, got ready their boat, while Ben Barnacle had the French tricolor run up at the mast-head.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW TOM BECOMES COMMANDANT OF THE FORTRESS.

WHEN the boat's crew, who were dressed as French sailors, landed, and Harry Vere, attired in the costume of a young officer of the Republic, stood in the presence of the brave leader, he could scarcely repress his enthusiastic looks of admiration.

Our hero, coldly recognizing his respectful salute, stiffly directed the sergeant to see to the embarkation of the munitions of war, while he himself proceeded to seal up the commandant's papers.

The whole of that day was occupied in passing to and from the ship to shore.

By evening the fortress was stripped of its stores.

To deceive the eyes of any who might be observing their proceedings, as Tom pretended, he had as many barrels conveyed back to the fort as he took from it; these were placed in the magazine.

Their contents were of a very suspicious nature, each barrel containing two of the boy-cruisers, who lay patiently doubled up and half-suffocated till the time came for their release, which took place at nightfall, when our hero adroitly removed the cask head, and in silent determination his devoted followers gathered around him.

Not a word was spoken.

The boy-adventurers were locked up in darkness, while their chieftain proceeded to the crowning part of his audacious stratagem.

He went back to the commandant's room, and seating himself at the table, rang the bell for the officer to appear, and began leisurely writing what seemed to be a dispatch.

"Citizen officer," he said, when the officer had stood uncovered in his presence some few minutes, "you will be good enough to dispatch ten soldiers and a corporal to the *Victoire*; they will be required to attest that they have seen the powder disposed in the war-sloop's magazine, they will make their observations and return."

The officer saluted and retired, and Tom continued his writing.

The officer had got about half-way along the corridor, when he abruptly paused; a sudden suspicion had flashed to his brain.

What if, after all, he was being betrayed, and was helping to lay the fortress defenseless and open to a traitorous attack!

He reeled under the vague misgiving.

A few moments' deep meditation, and on tiptoe he stole back to the commandant's room, and stooping down, peered through the keyhole.

Our hero was still seated at the table, the commandant's papers in sealed packets lay before him; he was slowly writing; a hard, inscrutable look was on his face, but not a muscle quivered.

The officer watched his hand travel across the paper—it never faltered or shook as it guided the obedient pen.

There was not the least sign of nervous haste or trepidation; one by one the words were firmly formed.

The suspicious Frenchman watched him finish and sign the document, which he addressed to the president of the republic, and after a moment's calm thought begin another.

"He is very young," thought the officer; "but there are times when a man's advancement rests on his exploits, not his age; his looks might decide the fate of a nation. I never saw so commanding an eye; his must be a will of iron. But what can he want of ten men to assist the stowage of our stores? Parbleu! He may, after all, be one whom our republic has rightly trusted, and my suspicions are ungenerous."

Apparently satisfied, the man dismissed the suspicion from his grim visage and went softly on his way.

But he acted with caution, nevertheless.

Selecting ten picked men, he called the corporal aside, and, without communicating his suspicions, said, after he had given him his instructions:

"Citizen Corporal, make use of your eyes and ears while on board, and inform me of all you see and hear."

The corporal touched his cap, the soldiers rammed the bullets down the barrels of their muskets, and in single file passed out of the fort.

The garrison numbered forty-five men, and this proceeding of Captain Tom was a device to get ten men out of his way, as well as to bring ten more of his crew to his side.

The corporal, alarmed by the hints of his superior officer, determined to be on his guard.

When the boat touched the ship, he ordered the soldiers to fix bayonets and ascend, he himself following last.

Nothing in the appearance of the vessel was otherwise than he might have expected from a war sloop, which, after being so long disguised, was bringing out its concealed armaments.

The brotherhood greeting, usual to the citizen soldiers of the Republic when they met, passed between him and Harry Vere; the latter led the way, and one by one the soldiers descended to the magazine.

This was the trap laid for them.

The entry was so dark and narrow that they could only enter singly.

The boy-adventurers were in ready ambush.

One by one the soldiers were seized, muffled and disarmed; and when the corporal entered last, and found himself all of a sudden pounced upon and gagged, he beheld, to his consternation, the whole of his detachment prisoners like himself.

A torrent of the most abusive oaths and curses saluted the boy-buccaneers as soon as the mouths of their captives were unfettered, but the daring boys, without ceremony, despoiled them of their uniforms, and bundled them neck and crop into a place of close confinement, where they might fume and chafe, and nibble their ragged mustaches off, in their rage at being trapped on board the jaunty vessel whose true character they recognized when too late.

A very short space of time sufficed for Harry Vere and ten of Tom's crew to disguise themselves in the costumes of their prisoners, and complete their make up with mustaches of the shaggiest and most fierce aspect.

Then they descended into the boat, and were silently rowed ashore.

Our hero contrived to have the officer in his presence, under pretense of placing under his care the commandant's papers.

But the soldier's ear detected the unclosing of the fortress gate, and he listened uneasily as the tramp—tramp of heavy feet passed along the corridor.

Eleven men.

He counted their steps as they passed the door.

Eleven men with bayonets fixed, walking in the direction of the magazine.

Presently they halted and grounded arms.

Captain Tom finished putting his signature to the document.

He, too, has listened, and the ring of steel, as the bayonets went past, was grateful in his ear.

He looked up at the officer's face, and saw the darkly-gathering doubts and suspicions the soldier could not conceal.

But his own features were stolid and inscrutable, as he said, coldly:

"These documents and treasonable papers, then, you will have in your charge, until orders from the republic relieve you of the care of the fortress."

The officer touched his cap.

He was eager to get away.

"And now, citizen officer," observed our hero, rising, "you will be good enough to parade your men under arms, with the exception of those on sentry, in the corridor leading to the magazine, that they may hear the orders of the glorious republic."

Tom walked to the door, and the officer, not daring to go towards the magazine and satisfy his suspicions, hurriedly saluted and went to assemble the garrison.

There was little light in the corridor; but the ten bayonets gleamed in the darkness, and our hero, approaching the dusky figures, recognized his own boy-followers.

Harry Vere, who had assumed the corporal's post, respectfully saluted him, and said, in a low tone:

"We have no time to lose. A French vessel has been descried; if she enters here we shall be taken like mice in a trap."

"We shall be speedy, now," Tom replied; "the officer suspects something wrong—be alert."

He retired to his room.

Tramp—tramp—tramp came the steps of the soldiery, their fixed bayonets glittering in the gloom—two abreast they advanced, the officer grim and watchful in front.

"Halt! Salute!" he cried, as he neared our hero.

Tom acknowledged the salute, and the soldiery passed by.

Hardly had the officer given the word to halt and ground arms, on arrival in front of the magazine, before our hero, with measured tread, came up.

He was in time to prevent the communication the officer was eager to hold with him he supposed to be his corporal.

It was rather a curious scene, this assemblage of armed soldiers in that gloomy corridor of the fortress, their officer stern and motionless at their head; the ten disguised adventurers, with Harry Vere, in rank by themselves, against the darkest wall; while between them and the rifled magazine stood the graceful figure of the boy-rover—the intrepid, princely commander—whose audacious pluck brought him and his devoted few into the very heart of one of the strongest fortresses of the Republic.

He wore his sword and belt, and his hat with the tri-colored cockade; a bundle of papers was thrust in his Republican coat, and amidst breathless silence, he took them forth and spoke in the cold, stern tone he knew so well how to adopt:

"Citizens, your Republic charged you with a sacred duty when it left you here with strict orders to guard the stores, which you have suffered to be taken from under your care. Traitor! I denounce you! Yield your scarf and arms to those who are no longer your comrades, and await the sentence of your unworthy negligence. Citizen corporal, arrest him!"

For a moment the officer stood thunder-stricken, but, as Henry Vere took a step forward, he sprang back among his men, and drawing his sword, cried:

"Treachery! Soldiers, we are betrayed! These are not comrades. Present—ready—fire! Shoot down these daring robbers, or the fortress will be in the hands of our accursed enemies!"

A subdued growl of sullen rage ran along the corridor, as the soldiery, stern and solemn, raised their weapons, and leveled them at our hero's breast.

Nine-and-twenty glittering bayonets pointed at his body—nine-and-twenty bullets ready to leap from the long, dull barrels, and riddle his heart, at the next movement of the aroused officer.

Death, sharp and certain, seemed looking, then, into the handsome face of the dauntless boy.

Yet in that moment, before foe could fire or friend could interpose before him, the daring boy, with one sweep of his arm, thrust open the door of the magazine, and cried, loudly, elate, as by twos and four his desperate band with glittering pike, cutlass, and pistol poured like a torrent to his side:

"Back, all of you! Who lifts a finger, dies! We outnumber you, with a desperate, daring band, inured to danger—sworn to death! Surrender! Your fortress is betrayed! Our guns are at your gates! Resistance is madness! These are my boy-rovers, and I am Captain Tom Drake!"

Even as his words were ringing in the ears of the French soldiery, the sullen boom of a gun came across the waters.

Our hero knew the signal to be one of danger.

He sprang to the casemate, and pulling down the iron screen, showed the astonished garrison the ship which they had imagined to belong to their Republic lying close under the fort, with her black banner with its silver cross flying, her boy-crew at their quarters, and every preparation made for an engagement.

The grim visage of the French officer fell as he saw this, but with an angry cry he urged his men to the conflict.

"Defend the fortress with your lives!" he roared. "Let us die gloriously in the cause of our Republic."

Like lightning the sword of our hero flashed from its sheath.

"You shall have your fill of fighting if you will!" he exclaimed; "but mark me, if a weapon is fired, or a bayonet tinged with blood, not one of you shall receive quarter. I will pile your bodies in a heap, and level the fortress with the ground."

He turned fiercely on the officer.

"Madman, sacrifice your own life, not the lives of your men!" he said, as he struck the officer's sword from his grasp, and made him prisoner.

The soldiery wavered—fighting was hopeless—and on Tom's next order to his crew to cut them down if they made any resistance, signified their surrender; and almost before the reverberations of the gun had died away, the fortress was in the hands of our rover and his crew, its colors torn down, and the English banner streaming from the highest tower.

The whole of the prisoners, having been disarmed, were marched outside the wall and bidden to disperse.

The officer was confined in a cell.

The soldiers' muskets were then placed in the boat.

The band of the boy adventurers struck up, from the ship, an inspiring tune; and our heroes embarked, taking with them the keys of the captured fortress.

One or two trading vessels were lying under the supposed protection of the fort.

These, when the French tricolor had floated from our hero's ship, had hoisted their gayest flags in honor of their fighting acquaintance.

The echo of that gun startled them from their peaceful dream, and looking up they saw the flag torn down, and the English colors fixed in their stead.

But a more rueful moment awaited them when the supposed *Victoire*, with the piratical flag, hove alongside them in succession, and they were boarded by a reckless, dare-devil set of young fellows, who lightened them of their cargo and possessions, and gave them fifteen minutes to clear out to sea.

When he had stripped every bark, Captain Tom turned the prow of his vessel seaward; and as the twilight deepened, they sailed out of sight of the fortress they had so gallantly taken.

Three days after some commotion was created amongst the British fleet by the rumor that one of their ships had been visited by a strange bark the skipper of which handed him a letter which ran as follows:

"The fortress of Renauf is defenseless, and left without a garrison. Its munitions I have captured. If you enter you will find its commandant and officers in the dungeon beneath the magazine. My flag, and the flag of my country, have replaced the tricolor."

"Signed, CAPTAIN TOM DRAKE."

The commander to whom this letter was delivered sneered incredulously at the idea of the impregnable fortress being taken; and it was not until confirmatory rumors of the flag being seen flying over the empty fortress arrived, that the British authorities bestirred themselves, and sent three ships of war to ascertain.

But the story of the daring act had already run like wildfire throughout the French frontier.

The day before the British ships arrived, the French, burning with shame at their humiliation, took swift measures.

The fortress was occupied by a strong force, and a French fleet protected it from the sea.

And thus was this important fortress—the capture of which forms one of the most daring exploits in history—lost by the stupidity and delay of the English commanders.

CHAPTER XX.

IN WHICH JERRY MIZZEN CLIMBS INTO THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

TOM had run his vessel into port at Rio Janeiro, and Jerry, with a number of others, obtained leave to go ashore.

Jerry, giving his party the slip, popped into one of the liveliest taverns, where he was soon joined by a merry party of sailors, with whom, as was his custom, he made so free that the night was far advanced before he remembered that his time was up, and that he ought to be on board.

With some difficulty he got away from his boon companions, and made his way alone towards the shore.

His gait was exceedingly unsteady—the result of the excessive potations he had taken—and his ideas concerning the number of ships at anchor or the stars overhead were not particularly clear.

Jerry was aware that he had been playing truant, and that the boat having been sent to pick up the men would not be likely to return for his especial benefit.

Besides, a punishment in the shape of short grog, and extra night watches awaited his truancy. So Jerry thought that if he could get into one of the boats, noiselessly push it off and row himself to the ship, he might clamber up the bows unseen by any but his mates, who were certain not to betray him.

Nearly all the boats were covered by a tarred sheet of canvas, and the first one towards which he staggered presented an obstacle in the form of a large, uncouth boatman, with a massive beard and white, glistening teeth, who, on being disturbed, growled out a furious curse, and as if about to spring to his feet, clutched his stiletto in a murderous sort of way, extremely uncomfortable to Jerry's feelings, who quickly covered him up again and left him to his repose.

He was more careful in peeping into the others, but so many of them had an occupant ensconced inside, like a periwinkle in the shell, or a kernel inside its nut, that Jerry began to despair of getting off at all.

To arouse one of the boatmen and get him to row to the ship was out of the question, as the fellows were such unmitigated thieves that he would have been certainly betrayed in the dispute about the fare.

Jerry found one at last tenantless, and adroitly unfastening it from its moorings he slipped into it and noiselessly pushed off from the beach.

Stealthily as he moved, he disturbed a fellow lying near, who sprang to his feet, and, grasping the boat by the prow, in a stentorian voice cursed Jerry for a thief.

Jerry had no time to lose; the fellow's brawny throat expanded to such good tune that he momentarily expected to have the whole body of savage boatmen aroused from their slumbers, and falling tooth and nail upon him.

Raising the oar with which he had been shoving off the boat, he lugged it straight at the boatman's chest, and sent him flying to the beach with all the breath knocked out of his body. At the same time, the impetus of the awkward thrust tumbled Jerry head over heels into the water as the boat shot out from the shore.

The unexpected sousing sobered Jerry a little; he made a few clumsy strokes, and reaching the boat clambered over the side and seated himself at the bottom, where he sat shivering with the effects of his cold bath, afraid to use the oars lest he should be heard, and expecting every moment to hear the boatmen, alarmed by their mate, come furiously in pursuit.

That worthy, however, had been dealt such an effective *coup de grace* that he had not once moved since the blade of the oar sent him sprawling on the shingle, and Jerry, beginning to wonder whether that stroke had finished him, peered over the bows, and saw that he was far enough away to ply his oars stealthily.

All remained quiet on land, and soon Jerry passed under the bows of the nearest ships. It was still very dark, the stars had faded from view, and the blackness that precedes the dawn of day enshrouded the scene.

It took him a long time to make out his own ship, and when at length he discovered her she was lying so close under the lee of a heavy frigate, that he fervently wished the darkness might continue until he was safely aboard.

Arrived near her quarter, he rested on his oars and took a good view to assure himself she was the right vessel.

Apparently she was lying in exactly the same position, and her stern facing the town, the roofs and spires of which he could see dimly in the distance; the only change was in the fact of the frigate being so close to her, and Jerry tried hard to come to a correct conclusion as to why the frigate was there now; but tried in vain, his ideas being extremely cloudy and vague.

No one was stirring on board, as Jerry, using only one oar, propelled his boat from the ship's quarter to her bows.

It was as he anticipated. All he had now to do was to get out of the boat and allow it to drift away while he climbed the chain. This feat he accomplished without any further mishap than slipping one leg into the water; but, as no shark was near to make an early mouthful off that member, and he was already too well soured to mind a little more wet, he did not look upon this as any disaster; but, steadying himself on the buoy began to clamber up the iron cable.

The anchor chain had been so excessively loaded with grease, that Jerry found the operation of mounting it less easy than he had expected; and when, by dint of extraordinary perseverance and agility, he got half up the chain, he found himself in the unpleasant predicament of being unable to get any further.

Perched monkey-fashion across the heavy links, suspended, as it were, Mahomet-tomb fashion, between Heaven and the ocean. Jerry, wishing hearty curses on the zealous hands that had so well greased the cable, gazed up to the bulwarks above him with the conscious feeling that the effort to get so high was beyond his powers, gazed downwards with the equally disagreeable certainty that if he slipped and to descend by any other means was an absolute impossibility—he must inevitably be maimed and stunned against the wooden buoy, and either quickly drowned or snapped up as a tasty morning meal by some foraging shark.

As if to add to his dilemma, the clouds of night were clearing away, and the light of daybreak—a light that would speedily betray him in his uncomfortable perch—approaching.

How long he might have remained clinging with hands and feet to the slippery chain is uncertain.

He was delivered from his quandary by a sudden inspiration, which induced him to take off his saturated necktie, and by passing it through the links get a purchase by which he was, after an exertion that, cold as the morning was, bathed his face in sweat, enabled to get within reach of the coveted bulwarks.

As he was pausing for the final spring, he heard a sound that sent all his blood, like an electric flame, to his heart, and arrested him where he clung.

A horrible misgiving, merging to a fearful certainty, broke suddenly upon his mind, and in his fright he was preparing for a descent at all hazards, when a flery grip clutched him by the hair—a second heavy hand seized him by the collar, and as a howl of fright broke from his parched lips he was lifted bodily over the bows and brought to his feet, not on the deck of his piratical vessel, but on the fore-castle of what he at once saw was an English armed schooner.

CHAPTER XXI.

TIED TO THE MAST.

To say that Jerry Mizzen's feet went from under him, and that all the breath left his body with the sudden shock, will only express the anticipations of our readers.

Never in his whole life had he been so completely staggered.

The sloop was the very counterpart of the pirate cruiser. Her size was the same, she occupied exactly the position taken up by the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, and so minutely resembled her that he was not certain he would not have picked her out

in broad daylight as the buccaneer's vessel, to whose deck he imagined he was climbing.

Had a half-spent cannon-ball struck him in the small of his back he could not have been more completely knocked all of a heap.

Very roughly he was skulldragged to his feet and enabled to look about him. A broad grin was on every face, and he could plainly perceive that his perilous ascent had been watched the whole time by those who had kept themselves concealed, waiting to pounce upon him so soon as his unfortunate head neared the bulwarks.

If he had experienced no uneasiness at his awkward mistake, the sight of a familiar face which he immediately discovered amongst the seamen would have been enough to make him wish himself on board again.

Andrews, his old enemy, the custom officer, whom he had served such a trick when leading him to the pretended capture of Tom, stood calmly and maliciously enjoying his discomfiture.

Jerry's face grew ruefully long.

The deck of that vessel was too hot a place for him.

He made a sudden bound to the side, with the intention of leaping neck or nothing overboard, but half-a-dozen brawny tars pounced upon him, and in a trice he was securely bound.

Andrews, who had lent active assistance in binding him, grinned savagely in his face.

"Don't run away from us, Jerry," he said. "You've been on a long cruise, and must want a change. You've tumbled into good hands, Jerry. I'll put in a good word for you if I can. I've been waiting a long time to pay you for that trick of the straw dummy."

Jerry wished devoutly he had burnt his fingers off before he had gone on shore, for then he would not have been in his present plight.

His rueful-looking visage lengthened as his captors dragged him the whole length of the ship and brought him before the officer commanding the sloop, a young, good-looking fellow, who scanned Jerry attentively, and after a few questions, ordered him to be taken below.

In ten minutes' time the boatswain came to tell Jerry that he would be taken on board the frigate as soon as the admiral had finished his breakfast.

"Admiral who?" Jerry asked, "and what's the frigate?"

"The frigate is the *Thunderer*, Captain Hyde, and the name of the admiral is Ellis," replied the boatswain, grimacing at Jerry's eagerness.

"Admiral Ellis—the devil! Then I hope he may choke before his breakfast is over."

The boatswain laughed at Jerry's vehemence.

"I ought to report you," he said, "but you'll have enough without me against you, and you'll get enough without my help."

"Shall I?" gasped Jerry. "You couldn't tell a fellow, now, what he's likely to get, could you?"

"Well, my hearty, you'll get a sound catting as a beginning, and you'll certainly be either hanged or shot directly afterwards. So make yourself easy, Jerry, and all I can say is, that if I've the stopping of the number of your mess I'll do it quick and comfortable for you."

"Will you?" thought Jerry, as the grinning boatswain left him; "you're a kind sort, you are. I hope I shan't want to trouble you, I'm sure. A precious pickle I've got in, all through that infernal carousal on shore. I know'd how they bring a fellow into trouble; they allers do; it's that skeleton gemman that done it as well. Jerry Mizzen ain't been hisself since that night—ugh!"

Jerry was not long left to his reflections.

The boatswain and three jolly tars presently descended to his place of confinement, and escorted him on deck.

Without being allowed to say a word he was bundled into a boat, and taken to the frigate.

Here he was bidden a derisive adieu by those who had brought him, and handed over to the charge of a squad of marines.

Jerry shook himself as a discontented dog might do at this new transfer.

To be skulldragged to his fate by his brother tars was not so repulsive, but to be marched off by a squad of stiff-necked, red-coated "jollies," was extremely repugnant to his feelings, and he eyed them with distasteful and supreme contempt when they placed him in their midst.

They had their bayonets fixed, which was another matter disagreeable to Jerry's nerves.

The little old admiral had descended from the quarter-deck, and with the commodore, Gaston, Captain Hyde, and an Irish peer by his side, stood by the mizen-mast. He was dressed with punctilious care, and his face was savage, sharp and stern.

When his small, gray, ferret-like eyes rested on Jerry, they seemed to run him through, and our adventurer's knees began to shake unsteadily.

The commodore looked bluff and glum—Captain Hyde was gentlemanly and at ease as usual—Gaston's features were bleared with hate; he looked as if it would give him some satisfaction to be able to revenge himself even on one of Tom's crew.

The corporal of marines gave the word, and Jerry was halted in front of the admiral, whose keen, dry visage never changed its set expression as his eyes met Jerry's rueful gaze.

"Corporal, bring your prisoner here," he said, in his harsh, dry tones, "and bind him to the mast."

Jerry was bumped with his back against the mast, and the marines not being able, on account of their stiff stocks and pipeclay, to tie him there, a couple of sailors ran a stout cord around his arms and waist, and bound him fast and taut.

The admiral coughed drily.

"So," he said, "you dare attempt to play the spy on board one of his majesty's ships? Who sent you here?"

"Me a spyin'. Oh, Lor', I'd sooner hev dropped to the bottom than a come here!" exclaimed the horrified and unfortunate Jerry.

"Oh," Admiral Ellis muttered, "then it was by a mistake you climbed the *Mercury's* anchor-chain. You were left ashore, then?"

"I went ashore yesterday, sir, and I wish I'd never had leave, for then this trouble wouldn't have nabbed me."

"Ah, indeed! well, now, sir, look around, and tell me if you see your pirate ship!"

"It's not likely, yer honor," Jerry replied, straining at his cords as he looked about him, "that he'd stay here when he smelt a frigate so close."

"No; the fellow has a wholesome fear of us," put in Captain Hyde. "Captain Parker and myself have chased him repeatedly in vain."

"It's like an eel, the way he slips through your fingers," remarked Lord Kilerew.

Admiral Ellis bit his lips.

"Tell me, fellow, for what purpose did he put into this port? My daughter, sir; was she on board his ship?"

"Ay—ay, sir, she was; she wanted laying over on her side, and being brushed up a bit."

"Who do you mean, you scoundrel?" cried the excited admiral; "my daughter, fellow?"

"Oh, Lord! no, your honor—the ship I meant."

"Hum—and who has charge of my child?"

Jerry was about to answer, her husband, but he did not relish the look of the old naval veteran's eye, so he invented a lie for the occasion.

"There's a nice young nigger she always has with her—sleeps with her—to keep her out of harm."

"A negro sleeps with my daughter!" vociferated the admiral. "Prick him with your bayonet, corporal, and if I raise my hand, run the scoundrel through."

"Oh, murder!" bawled Jerry, wriggling from the sharp weapon, "it's a nigger woman I meant. Yes, your honor, and very careful she is to look after her well, for you know, sir, she's a devil to romp with the—"

The little admiral pounced upon him instantly.

"You are laughing, fellow!" he cried; "laughing at us!"

The way the admiral yelped at him nearly took him off his feet, and before he knew where he was he was under arrest and dragged off to bear his punishment for laughing at the admiral.

Jerry was now subjected to a continued cross-questioning respecting the probable movements of his ship, every endeavor being made to frighten him into betraying all he knew; his brief survey of the harbor had convinced him that under whatever guise he had effected his flight, Captain Tom had quitted the place, either in the preceding evening or under cover of the night's darkness. He was, therefore, able to answer more readily questions which, had there been any danger to his daring chieftain in them, he would have been slowly pricked to death before he would have replied.

Even as it was he lied most plentifully, and the description he gave of the altered trim of the Boy Cruiser's ship was so striking that Ellis walked the quarter-deck to see if he could make out through his telescope the runaway *Will-o'-the-Wisp*.

A long and careful survey afforded him no clew, and with deeper vexation on his withered visage he was stepping down the ladder, when his sword got between his legs, his foot slipped, and he fell with a bump to the cleanly scrubbed boards.

It was a tremendous fall; all his dignity was lost in it; his cocked-hat flew one way, his telescope another; his boots stuck out; his arms were outstretched, and his whole posture so ludicrous that Jerry Mizzen, forgetful of his position, laughed outright.

The old fellow leaped to his feet before any one could pick him up.

He fixed his wrathful eyes on Jerry, and in a voice which made that individual shake in his shoes, cried:

"Take down that fellow, make a spread eagle of him in the dark-hole till daybreak, when he shall be hanged at the yard-arm."

CHATER XXII.

CAST ON THE SEA WITH A HEADLESS COMPANION.

LEAVING the unlucky Jerry Mizzen for the present in his disagreeable pickle, we will follow anew the adventures of our hero, who, having seen the frigate bearing into port, had rapidly altered his vessel's trim, and got out of port almost under her very bows.

It was the hour of noon a day or two after their departure from Rio Janeiro.

Our hero, with Zelia reclining at his feet—Harry Vere, Jenny, and Ben Barnacle at his side—sat under a canopy on the quarter-deck, watching the glorious expanse of wave and sky.

The breeze had fallen, and they were lying almost idle on the glistening waters; a few of the white sails fluttered listlessly in the calm, the boy crew stood in groups by the vessel's sides; the guns were tomponed, and a peaceful quiet reigned on board the notorious cruiser—a quiet that, like the tiger's glossy skin, only concealed her deadly powers; the least alarm, and her warlike character would have been displayed, and the gentle-looking middies, armed to the teeth, have stood by the loaded guns ready to battle to the death.

At present her aspect was, as I have said, peaceful enough, and the same quiet seemed to reign in the hearts of the daring boy chieftain and his friends.

Our hero and Ben Barnacle were in earnest conversation, Zelia's face upturned as she listened to her boy lover's words, when Bob Hauler came aft and respectfully saluted his chief.

"Well, Hauler," our hero said, adopting this pleasant manner that helped to gain him the hearts of the men, "you wish to speak to me?"

Bob touched his forelock.

"Ax pardon, sir, but thought I'd tell you. Jerry Mizzen went on shore just before we made our run from port, and he ain't been seen nor heard of since."

"Left ashore! a most unfortunate fellow. Well, Hauler, we shall be back there in a day or two, and then we may find your mate—he'll lie snug enough when he finds we're gone, I'll warrant, especially when he sees the frigate that came to take us."

"Ay, ay, that he will, sir," replied Bob, and again saluting he withdrew, little thinking of the plight the luckless Jerry had got himself into.

The cry of the man at the mast-head presently rang out:

"Aloft, sir."

"Ay, ay," Tom said. "What now?"

"Something ahead, sir."

"Where away?"

"Off the starboard quarter. A good two leagues, I should say."

"What do you make it out?"

"Looks like a raft, sir, as near as I can make out; but it goes out of sight every moment."

Tom leaped to his feet, and springing lightly to the rigging, looked in the direction whence the strange object came.

It was sometime before he could discern the small speck floating flat upon the water; but he had no doubt of its being a raft—perhaps with some living occupant on board, whom they might yet save from a lingering death.

He jumped down to the deck, and handing the glass to Ben Barnacle, had fresh canvas adjusted to catch the slight breeze, and saw that the prow of the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* was guided towards the distant speck.

Zelia, standing beside Ben Barnacle, watched his features anxiously.

"Is it a raft?" she said, at length.

Ben Barnacle replied in the affirmative as he gallantly gave her the telescope, and turning to our hero, said:

"There's something aboard that looks like a human being, only it does not move, and our course is so slow we scarcely seem even to creep near enough to see."

"There isn't a capful of wind," Tom replied; "but we are catching all we can."

The middies had crowded to the vessel's bulwarks, and were looking eagerly in the distance, while Bob Hauler, and a few of the older-sailors, who had a strong belief in sea superstitions, were whistling assiduously for the wind to come.

An exclamation from Zelia caused all eyes to strain in the distance.

"It is a woman," she said. "She is lying as if

dead. Something I cannot make out is beside her."

This intelligence increased the excitement on board, and the raft was never lost sight of as it floated nearer.

It was close enough for the telescope to reveal it distinctly.

Ben Barnacle surveyed it curiously.

"Well," Tom said, "is Zelia correct?"

"She is," Ben answered. "A woman is lying across the raft. She is bound to a spar, and is either sleeping or dead."

"Can you make out the object beside her?"

"The headless trunk of a man," Ben replied, in a tone that made his listeners shudder.

It could be seen that it was a roughly formed raft of broken spars and masts.

Lying right across it, bound hand and foot, was a young and delicate-looking female, pale and ghastly as the dead.

Her eyes were closed, her colorless hands, corded together, were clasped upon her fair bosom.

The sea gushed over her at every wave, and she gave no sign of life.

Bound to her side was the headless trunk of a man in naval attire.

The head was tied between his hands, but was so slashed and disfigured that the features could not be traced.

Strong excitement was depicted on the faces of the daring boys, and they looked anxiously towards their youthful leader, who now cried, in a ringing voice:

"Lower a boat. Jump in her Ben, and bring the raft alongside. We may unravel this terrible mystery."

Willing hands promptly lowered the boat.

Ben Barnacle and half a dozen of the boy crew sprang in.

A few strokes brought them to the raft, which was quickly taken in tow and brought to the vessel.

The order was given to lay to, and then Ben Barnacle, with reverential tenderness, proceeded to unfasten the thongs that bound the pallid girl to the spar.

Death seemed to have done its work, as he bent over her; her soft white throat was marble cold, and her fair fingers pressed into her wasted arms by the hard cords, were blue and corpse-like.

Her eyes were closed; her lips were slightly apart, and as Ben lifted her in his strong arms her head fell heavily back.

She had been rudely and cruelly bound.

A cord was passed around her waist so tightly as almost to cause suffocation, another bound her feet to the spar, its coils deeply imbedded in her soft skin.

Her wrists and arms were bruised, swollen, and bleeding.

With deep fierceness in his heart against the inhuman monsters who had perpetrated such deliberate cruelty, Ben Barnacle swiftly cut the galling thongs and released her.

She was light as a child in his arms, as he sprang up the vessel's side and leaped with her on deck.

There was little to be gathered from the appearance of the raft; excepting the huddled form of the headless man, and the cords which had bound the young girl, nothing was there.

The corpse was evidently that of a merchantman's captain, but nothing was left on him to lead to his identity, but on raising him they saw that his breast had been gashed open, and the ghastly shape of a death's head and crossbones slashed upon it.

The spars and broken masts had been cut down with hatchets.

Some bits of cordage still clung to them; in places they were marked with bullet-holes, and one was splintered at the end, as if shattered by a cannon-ball.

Beyond this the mysterious raft gave no clew—no clew as to name or destination, but enough for our adventurers to surmise that those broken spars were the remnants of a merchant vessel, whose crew and passengers had met their fate at the hands of merciless pirates.

"We can do nothing more here, Ben," Tom said, "except commit this dismembered body to the deep; it has drifted to sailors' hands, and shall have a sailor's burial."

Ben Barnacle inclined his head; a hasty shroud was made, and the ill-fated skipper committed to an ocean grave, when the raft was cut adrift, and Tom and his followers returned on board.

The only chance of learning the sad details of the story rested with the maiden whom they had conveyed, apparently lifeless, below.

Doctor Shrike was with her, but on Tom sending to ask if he might descend, he received word to come.

The faces of Zeila and Jenny were almost as pale as that of the young girl over whom they

were tenderly bending; but from their looks Captain Tom saw at once that he was not in the presence of the dead.

Doctor Shrike's skill had brought back a faint pulsation of life to the poor girl's heart; her stained and sea-steeped garments had been exchanged for some of Zeila's softest robes, and while the doctor was administering his restoratives, Jenny and the corsair maiden had dried her rich, dark tresses, which were matted with seaweeds and the salt of the spray, and smoothed them over her pale, placid brow.

Doctor Shrike sidled up to our hero's side, and spoke:

"She has been in a swooning state some days; to that she owes her existence. She is in a semistupor now, but her return to life is certain. The medicaments I have used are potent, and for my skill, the fact that she breathes will answer. She is an interesting case to add to the 'Book of Medicines,'" the gaunt, vulture-faced doctor continued, gazing with professional pride on his unconscious patient; "but it is questionable whether it would not, after all, have been better to have let her sink into the sleep of death."

"It is our duty to save life," Tom remarked, quietly.

Doctor Shrike gave vent to an amused chuckle: "To save life!" he cried, rubbing his claw-like hands, "he-he! Why, I have seen you slice away at a dozen lives, as if for mere sport. To save life! and the limbs I've seen you hack!—ho-ho!—he-he!—a capital joke! Why, I shall die wheezing at the very idea."

He shuffled off to a corner of the cabin, where he sat chuckling and sniggering audibly.

He had not got over the idea by the time our hero quitted the cabin; and even the calm rebuke his boy chief gave him did not restrain his glee.

He gave strict injunctions, however, that the patient should not be asked to speak, and the cabin having been darkened in accordance with his wish, he left his pallid charge to the care of Jenny and the corsair girl.

"Jacob!" he bellowed, as soon as he got clear of the cabin, "bring me the man with his head chopped off, and I will see if he can be brought to life again—he-he!"

He chuckled dryly as the long, slim form of Jacob appeared.

"There ain't any man with his head off here," that worthy said.

"The man that came in the raft with his head in his hands—ho-ho!"

"Ho-ho, and he-he," mimicked Jacob; "they threw the fellow overboard."

"What!" screeched the doctor, "threw him overboard! and you let them do that, when I had not even looked at the cut, to see if his head was cleanly cut off or haggled? Get out of my sight, you poison spawn—get out of my sight! To lose such a subject! Get out of my sight, or I'll flay you with this scalpel!"

He made an excited rush at his faithful man, who had only time to dodge back as the ugly looking instrument shot past him.

The impetus with which the irate doctor flew at his man made him lose his balance, and he went head over heels down the gangway.

Jacob very philosophically looked after his angered master, and having seen him pick himself up, slunk away out of further danger, while Doctor Shrike, jumping to his feet, rushed furiously to his berth and vehemently cursed every one on board the ship for losing him so fine a subject.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEATH'S HEAD PIRATE OF THE MYSTIC SHIP.

ONE quiet evening, Doctor Shrike having granted his permission, she told them the story all were anxious to learn.

Almost her first inquiry had been concerning the headless man who was found at her feet; but though she had shuddered at the recollection of the horrible contact, she did not display that emotion which had been anticipated.

The simple truth was, he was no friend or relative of hers.

The story she told was a singular one. She had been sent to India a few years previous to join her father, a gentleman of property, much persecuted by the English authorities, who, under the pretense of his disloyalty, were striving to confiscate his property.

Fearful that they might accomplish at his death what they could not accomplish in his lifetime, he sold off the whole of his property, and purchased with the proceeds a large emerald, of rare size and beauty, and valued at many thousands of pounds.

It was a jewel with a history. Its first possessor had, it was said, brought it from the depths of the sea, where it had been embedded.

But its possession led to his being cruelly assassinated by an Indian prince, who coveted the

precious gem. He, in turn, was murdered by his own sister, she falling by the hands of her son.

Princes had warred for it, and its last owner, a needy potentate, sold it to Andrew Melville—such was her father's name—with strict injunctions to secrecy.

Her father, afraid of the perils he incurred, determined to send his daughter to England with the jewel; arrived there she was to convert it into money, be wedded to a young officer to whom she was engaged, and send for her father, he having an imitation of the emerald made, which he carried about him as if it were the real gem.

His fancied possession of the fatal jewel proved as dangerous to him as the rest.

On the very night before his daughter's departure for Europe he was waylaid and so brutally hacked with knives that he only lived long enough to enjoin his child to flee the country before his murderers discovered they had only stolen the imitation.

Thus, without being able to see her father's remains interred, she was forced to flee.

But the curse of blood still hung over the fatal emerald.

The captain of the vessel in which she had hastily embarked proved to be a notorious slaver and pirate.

He plundered his passengers of all their valuables, and in spite of Miss Melville's efforts to conceal possession of the emerald, he dragged it from her bosom.

This was at daybreak.

At nightfall, while the slaver captain strode up and down his deck, cursing the idle breeze, which kept him almost motionless, a large vessel, propelled by double rows of sweeps, came down upon him, and without giving him even the warning of hoisting a black flag, deluged his decks with broadsides of grape and hail, and before he could recover from the shock, he was boarded by a crew of ruthless Barbary pirates, who butchered all they came near.

Their leader, a hideous being, with the head of a skeleton in the place of a human face, seemed literally to glut himself in blood.

He spared none—neither man, woman, nor child—herself and the slaver captain excepted, the latter saving his life at the time by dazzling the Death Pirate's eyes with the lustrous emerald, but which the horrible monster no sooner grasped, than, with a fiendish laugh, he flung him to the deck, and gashed his breast open in the terrible manner they had seen.

Expecting every instant her own doom, she had barely consciousness enough to know what happened to her till she found herself bandaged on the broken raft with the slaver captain by her side.

He was not dead then, though covered in blood, but was still hoping to escape with life, when the Death Pirate, amidst the mocking laughter of his atrocious followers, hacked his face about till it was indistinguishable, and swept his head from his shoulders.

It was bound then to the hands of the bleeding corpse, and with her senses swooning, she felt herself drifting over the sea in the grim company of the dead slaver captain, the mocking scoff of the merciless pirates grating on her ears as her senses died away, and she thought she had closed her eyes forever.

How long she was upon the water she could not tell. It must have been many days—ages it appeared to her; but she was mercifully nearly the whole time in continued swoons, and thus, she believed, escaped the terrible results of her fearful situation.

When Helen Melville had finished her interesting recital, she sighed, and said:

"That fatal sea emerald has had, indeed, a curse of blood upon it, and not only have I lost a father, but now I am penniless and without a friend."

"Not without friends," Jenny Vere observed.

"Nor penniless," Tom cried, excitedly. "We have wealth and to spare, and you shall share with me; and as for this sea emerald, we will see whether the curse of blood still clings to it. I have heard of this Death Pirate—a grisly being, whom no power can subdue. To seek him shall be our next cruise, and when we meet, by force or stratagem, I will wrest the precious jewel from his grasp."

Singular to relate, no sooner had this resolve been communicated by Tom to his crew, and the ship's prow was turned towards the Barbary coast, than, as if the celebrated jewel had the power of drawing those who sought it into danger, tidings of the mysterious and merciless death pirate came to the ears of our adventurers at every turn.

But everywhere the story was the same dire tale of merciless bloodshed and plunder.

Every report mentioned a hideous unhuman object, with the form of a man and the head of a

skeleton, as the grisly leader of as brutal a horde of ravages as ever left their task of bloodshed on the ocean's breast.

Tom kept pretty well in his wake.

The pirate was as swift in his movements as our hero, and had the same knack of running from place to place, turning up when least expected, and far from where last heard of.

He brought up with him at last, and of all places the least unexpected, at Rio Janeiro.

The trim of the Barbary ship had been altered, and she now appeared as a respectable Indian trader.

Her warlike armament was well concealed, and a brace of Parsee merchants—a pair of astute vagabonds and cut-throats, prepared to swear to any villainous lie—were on board to attest the ship's respectability, and render any other service as needs might be.

If they deceived every one else, they were not so successful with our hero.

The keen perception of the roving boy taught him how to penetrate her disguise, and without exciting suspicion by anchoring beside her, he lay close enough to overlook her decks, and see his suspicions confirmed a score of ways. He saw many villainous-looking, yellow-faced old scoundrels dressed as merchants, but who, he felt pretty certain, were disguised pirates.

Of their grisly leader he saw nothing, except one night when, from his place of concealment, his telescope enabled him to discern an uncouth figure concealed by a cloak, hiding even his face from view, stalk along the deck and survey the shipping in port.

And once, as he turned, our hero caught sight of a hideously protruding piece of ghastly bone where the face should have been, and then he had no doubt that he gazed upon the fearful being known as the Death Pirate.

When he had assured himself of this, Tom Drake addressed himself to Ben Barnacle, and informed him that he had made up his mind to get on board the corsair ship alone, and on that very night.

"Now it is a favorable moment," he added. "Half their crew is on shore; a great number lie concealed under the hatchways. I shall assume to be an officer of this port, and once in the cabin of this Death Pirate, be he man or demon, he shall yield to me. If I should come to grief, Ben," he observed in conclusion, "attack him without mercy—even here, under the guns of Rio Janeiro."

Half an hour later our hero was rowed ashore.

He had changed his intention, and instead of assuming the disguise of a Rio Janeiro officer, took with him an oriental costume in which he arrayed himself after leaving the boat, and then, after instituting the necessary inquiries, had himself taken to the disguised ship of the Death Pirate.

He learned all he required to know—the name of the vessel and its supposed captain.

Arrived at the corsair's sides, he was challenged from the deck.

To this he replied in Algerian, stating he had private business with the captain, and was at once desired to ascend.

The person to whom he was introduced as the captain was a knavish half-cast African—certainly not the being whom he sought for.

Tom disposed of him in a few whispered words, giving him to understand that he had a secret warning to convey to their leader, and without waiting for further leave, stepped quietly down to the principal cabin.

His abrupt entry disturbed the occupant—a being fearful to behold.

A figure attired in eastern costume, armed with cimeter, yataghan and pistol—the hands horribly long and claw-like—the face, not the face of man, but the grisly mask of a death's head, behind which glistened two demoniac eyes.

Daring as our hero was, the sudden vision of the hideous being gave him a start; but he instantly recovered himself, and standing between the cabin door and the Death Pirate, as the disguised being leaped to his feet, and grasped the hilt of his cimeter, said in excellent Algerian:

"Pirate, you are discovered—I am Captain Tom Drake! My ship is at hand with orders to attack you, and reveal your real character if I do not return within fifteen minutes. Before I return, I require from you the Sea Emerald, now in your possession—I also intend to see your face."

The demoniacal eyes of the Death Pirate glared horribly, and striding towards our hero, he clapped his hands, and with a hoarse voice, cried:

"You are in a cage, brave bird; and had you a hundred lives you could not escape. The signal I have given will spread our sails—I defy all the ships in this port to stop my course; and as for your crew, we will show them your gory head stuck like a scare-crow above our banner as we pass like the wind."

The Death Pirate's laugh had hardly died away

when a tramping of feet and sound of hurried voices convinced Tom how well he had been obeyed.

Like lightning his sword flew from its scabbard, and closing the door, which shut with a spring, he leaped upon his grim antagonist.

There was no need of further words. Each knew by instinct the mettle of the other.

Our hero had worn a huge turban and long robe. These he threw off and cast at Death Pirate as he drew a pistol out from his belt and fired.

The folds of the garment diverted his aim, and before he could do more than draw his yataghan, Tom had dashed the pistol from his grasp and seized him by the throat.

Forcing him back over a gilded piece of furniture, he thrust his knee in his chest and held him powerless, while, with eager haste, he felt for the sea emerald.

His hand touched the jewel at last—it was in a bag over the pirate's heart—but in the act of drawing it forth he paused, to snatch the mask of death which hid his antagonist's features.

This act seemed more to excite the Death Pirate than the expected loss of the priceless emerald. He uttered a cry more like a fiend's than a man's, and, with a sudden exercise of strength, broke from our hero's hold.

At the same moment the cabin door was noiselessly opened, and the African, who acted as the captain's servant, stole behind the daring boy.

Unseen by Tom, he raised his deadly stiletto, when the youthful chieftain's attention was attracted by the noise of armed men descending to the cabin, and he sprang back in time to escape the assassin's stab.

It was well that he did so. The stiletto was poisoned, and a scratch would have been his death.

The movement allowed Death Pirate to spring again to the attack, at the same time that a score or more of his armed followers broke into the cabin with matchlocks, swords, and daggers, prepared for a deadly onset on their victim.

Tom Drake felt the cabin floor giving beneath his tread, and he knew that the pirate vessel was moving out to sea.

His danger was certainly as imminent as it had ever yet been; but, furious as a young leopard brought to bay by the hunters, he turned upon his assailants.

One swinging cut of his heavy sword stretched the treacherous black bleeding at his feet; a second struck the helmet from Death Pirate's head; then, with bounding heart, he leaped to the cabin window and, facing the herd of savage pirates, cried:

"Take me who can! Pirate, I am beaten now; but, mark me, Captain Tom Drake will return to wrest the jewel from your grasp, and rend the mask from your face!"

Captain Tom Drake!

The merciless corsairs had heard the dreadful name, and awed by the imposing attitude of the undaunted boy rover, they let the moment slip by in which they might have easily brought him down.

Death Pirate, with a bitter imprecation, sprang to the window.

A stab—swift, sharp and true, sent from our hero's hand, struck the grisly death's head across the bony brow, and sent him reeling back.

Then arose a fearful crash and tumult—a dozen matchlocks flashed. There was the crashing of shattered glass; the intrepid boy, bleeding and confused, stood reeling in their sight; and as the corsairs bounded forth to slay him, if yet he lived, a cry, whether of defiance or his last death agony, sounded in their ears, and Tom fell backward into the sea.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OUR HERO HAS ANOTHER CHASE FOR THE BIG EMERALD.

THIS sudden tumult and activity was observed not only by the watchful crew on board our hero's ship, but by the authorities on shore, and all the other vessels in the port.

The noise of fire-arms, and the sudden movements of the Barbary ship, excited suspicion, and two frigates immediately left to stop her departure, while the cannon from the forts played with a sudden roar.

But the corsair turned suddenly upon them, and left the marks of her teeth upon the two frigates.

Then she turned her broadside toward the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, and as if in sheer-wanton devilry, swept her deck with a shower of deadly grape.

The boy adventurers would have tackled her instantly, if Ben Barnacle had not at that juncture discerned his beloved young chieftain struggling, faint and bleeding, in the water.

Restraining the excitement of his impetuous crew, who were burning to cast themselves on the brutal corsairs, he sprang over the ship's side, and swam to Tom.

The dauntless boy was exhausted with loss of blood, and in spite of his indomitable energy, was sinking when Ben Barnacle flung one arm around him, and buoyed him on the surface.

This timely rescue—which was greeted with loud cheers from the ships in harbor—was the occasion of a dastardly attack from the unfeeling corsairs, who leveled a gun at Ben Barnacle, and fired with such deadly aim, that the huge cannon ball tore up the water beside the gallant-hearted fellow, and literally blinded him with spray.

Smarting as were the boy adventurers under this new affront—which had so nearly cost them the lives of their idolized leader and the faithful Ben Barnacle—their attention was given to his rescue; boats were lowered, and the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* swung around to intercept the corsair's guns, if she should renew her dastard fire.

She contented herself, however, with merely sheering off, and Tom, in an exhausted state, was carried on deck.

He had been hit in three places, and the blood was oozing from his vest as well as down his clear forehead as he lay tenderly supported on Ben Barnacle's arm.

Stricken as he was, his strong young brain could not give way, and bounding erect, he cried, angrily:

"The corsair—she will escape—attack her; she has baffled me, and I will still have my revenge."

He clutched at his empty scabbard—his sword had gone to the bottom of the bay—but his momentary strength forsook him—a sickly smile flitted across his lips, his cheeks paled, and in a low tone he asked for drink.

Harry Vere brought him a goblet filled with luscious wine, and he drank it to the dregs.

It gave him fresh strength, and gasping wildly for air, he ordered swift pursuit and attack on the Barbary pirates.

Ben Barnacle was still supporting him.

Then one of the frigates ranged alongside.

"Ship ahoy, there!" hailed the captain, in French. "We saw you attacked; if you are much hurt, we can give you help."

Captain Tom Drake hurled the goblet he still held in his hand to the deck.

"Give help to those who cannot help themselves," he cried hoarsely, "and not to Captain Tom Drake."

The impulsive boy's rash words were ringing in the air as the frigate dropped astern, her commander petrified at what he had heard.

Then our hero's head sank again on Ben Barnacle's shoulder.

"Let me help you below," the faithful fellow urged. "You are seriously wounded. Have your hurts bound up or this drain of blood will kill you."

"No—no," cried the heroic boy, a hectic flush burning on his cheek; "lay me on deck, where I can see how we gain on our foe. Let my wounds be bound up here; they are deep, but I will deal deeper ones to avenge them yet."

Zeila, who had hovered near her boy hero, fearfully shrinking from his violence of manner, hurried to her cabin and brought two of her softest cushions. These were placed in a raised position on the quarter-deck, and then Tom suffered himself to be laid down and to have his hurts examined.

Two of the bullets had gone deep into his flesh, and their extraction was a slow and tedious process, but the headstrong boy never flinched during the operation.

Zeila sighed as she saw them taken from his fair flesh, took the bits of murderous lead from the doctor's hand, and stamped them under her feet.

"Would that Zeila could lodge them in the Death Pirate's heart!" she cried, her cheeks crimson with excitement and passion.

Our hero took her hand.

"We shall meet him yet," he said, faintly, "and then he shall pay for this."

Helen Melville, who had stood weeping apart, sobbed bitterly on Jacob's bosom.

"It is the curse of blood on that fatal jewel!" she sighed. "Would that I had never told him the story."

Softly as she spoke, Tom heard her, and he clenched his hands in impotent rage. Dr. Shrike, who was afraid he would spoil all his pains-taking in the way of applying bandages, and make his wounds break out afresh, heartily cursed the Sea Emerald, and wished it with its history, Helen Melville, and all, at the bottom of the sea.

Having relieved himself next by breaking a bowl over the thick head of his faithful Jacob, he proceeded to another part of the vessel, where those who had been swept down by the corsair's

sudden broadside lay wounded and requiring his care.

The corsair vessel had the advantage of a start, and the peculiar arrangement of tiers upon tiers of sweeps, working like so many powerful oars, greatly accelerated her speed, and night came on before she could be overtaken.

A sharp lookout was kept for daybreak, but the morning light showed no vestige of the pirate.

All that day and the next they cruised, meeting with no fresh adventure, except encountering their old friend *Arelhusa*, whom they eluded as before, without the trouble of firing a gun.

A week was spent in the fruitless cruise.

By that time Tom's wounds were healing, and the fierceness of his mortification at his defeat was partly subdued.

But there was no change in the deep-settled purpose of his heart.

He had sworn to hunt the Death Pirate to the furthestmost corners of the earth, and he was of a right nature to keep his word.

Meanwhile Death Pirate sailed on his murderous cruise.

Never a sun set but had witnessed some atrocious deed committed by his merciless crew.

Many a defenseless ship was boarded and taken; many a brave husband died bleeding in his wife's arms; many an innocent child was slaughtered on its mother's bosom.

Such tragic deeds could not escape being known, and the Death Pirate was chased by English ships.

But the terrible corsairs were too powerful to be taken, and each vessel sent out to destroy them was driven from the conflict shattered and beaten.

Running the gauntlet of a whole squadron, the Death Pirate made for the shores of the Dardanelles, and cast anchor at Constantinople.

A merchant lived there to whom he usually disposed of his blood-stained spoils, and having effected a sale of every valuable—including the precious emerald—he re-embarked, and steered for the Mediterranean.

Captain Tom, following in his wake, arrived at the city of the East immediately afterwards, and learned that the corsair had been there, and was gone.

It was the first time our hero had seen the famed city of domes and minarets, and quelling his impatience to overtake the Death Pirate, he determined to pay a visit on shore.

At that time it was death to any stranger to be found within the city gates, and Zeila, who had taught Tom perfectly the Eastern language, cautioned him that it was death to enter a Turk's house unbidden; death to speak to a female; death to even gaze at the face of a lady of any rank.

A massive beard and turban and a sweeping robe transformed the graceful young chieftain into a ferocious Turk, and chiding Zeila for her fears, he proceeded to the shore.

Everything he now saw delighted and interested him. He walked amidst whole lines of shops heaped with the rarest silks and velvets, the costliest arms and most priceless jewels.

So much wealth was displayed temptingly around him, that he could not help thinking what a splendid booty it would make for his middies to carry off.

He saw many Oriental ladies, but their faces were hidden by the thick veil universally worn, and he longed to tear aside the hideous mufflers, and gaze on the fair features of the lovely damsels.

Tired at last with his rambles, he seated himself by a fountain beneath a cypress tree, and deep in meditation, did not notice that his Musulman garb had fallen aside, disclosing his richly embroidered corsair vest and jacket, or that he had been for some time the object of the gaze of a pair of large, lustrous eyes, belonging to a girlish maiden, who had been some time blushing regarding him, having, almost at the first glance, penetrated his disguise.

When our hero raised his eyes and saw the dark-eyed damsel, he sprang to his feet, and forgetful of the penalty of his act, suddenly seized her by the hands and addressed her softly in her own language.

Startled by his abrupt behavior, the girl uttered a slight cry of alarm, and would have fled if Tom had not slid his arm around her supple waist, and with gentle force held her beating bosom to his heart.

"Struggle not, fair one," he cried, ardently, "I know it is death to hold you in my arm and gaze on your sweet face. But I am a stranger seeking rest and shelter. Will you betray me?"

The girl tried to withdraw herself from his grasp, and to turn away from his pleading earnest gaze.

She knew the sin and peril of his act, but his thrilling tones enthralled her heart, and she re-

mained entranced while he drew her fair face towards him, and putting aside her veil, permissively kissed her ripe lips.

"Oh! sir, are you mad?" she said in a low, musical voice. "If we are seen, the men would kill me and you without mercy. Leave me; and if you are a dreaded corsair, escape before your disguise is discovered."

"Nay," our hero cried, gallantly; "I am too fearless a corsair to flee from the delicious bliss of this sweet embrace. I would not flinch were twenty spears being driven into my breast. Let me hold you thus, and I could endure death a thousand times."

Captain Tom was certainly a most persuasive wooer; the very audacity of his daring gallantry more than won the peerless maiden's heart.

She could see by the symmetry of his elegant form that he was young and noble; and as he spoke, he removed his beard, and she saw how handsome and fearless his features were. She trembled like a captive bird at the thought of the deadly danger there was in that stolen meeting, but his rich, earnest tones charmed her, and she suffered him to lead her unresistingly into the shadow of the tall cypress trees.

"And now, fair angel," Tom said, still holding her to his heart, and gently caressing her, "tell me your name, that I may remember you when far from this enchanted paradise, for I must soon depart. My vessel lies on the blue Bosphorus, her white sails set, like the wings of a bird, ready for flight."

"Lena is my name," whispered the blushing girl. "I live with my uncle, Imaun Bey, a rich merchant, but a bad man. He has dealings with the terrible Barbary pirates, and I fear will some day sell me to those inhuman wretches, if, indeed, his base passions do not doom me to a worse fate."

The maiden's cheeks grew paler as she spoke.

His adventure was growing interesting.

Here was a case for interference. A young and beautiful damsel, left to the brutal disposal of a sordid knave, whose vicious passions might carry him to an excess.

"And where does your relative dwell?" he asked, eagerly.

"Not far from where we are; he has a shop in the bazaar stored with rich jewels—he buys them of the pirates," she added in a whisper, as if fearful of being heard.

Our hero pricked up his ears.

"Indeed! Do you know the name of any of those pirates?"

"No, I have never heard them named, but I have peeped through the lattice, and once I saw one of them—a dreadful being"—she shuddered and nestled closer to Tom as she spoke—"hideous man, with a horrible skull where his face should have been!"

Our hero uttered an incautious cry.

"The Death Pirate!" he exclaimed. "Fate plays into my hands. When—when, dearest, was he last here?"

"But two days since. Hush! not so loud, we shall be heard!"

"Forgive my rashness. Tell me, has your uncle, think you, purchased any gems of value of him lately—one in particular, a large emerald of rich luster and beauty?"

"He has—I saw it in his hands. He caressed it as if it were a gem from Heaven—lavished his kisses on it—and wears it near his heart!"

"The Sea Emerald," Tom cried, "with its curse of blood! Over his heart! by Heavens, he shall sleep to-night with my dagger's point driven to its very core! Lena, dearest, enter your uncle's house. You must admit me to-night by your latticed window, or I will come battering at the door. Your uncle must lose this jewel, or guard it with his life! Fear not danger. You, too, I will bear hence! Nay, deny me not; I cannot brook control! There is hot blood in my veins, and when it surges like this to my temples, I should not hesitate had I to step to death! Haste—I will follow your steps! My disguise will hide my real character. I will be in waiting by your window, and when all is still, you must admit me. Oppose me not—flee quickly—do my bidding, or beware of more desperate deeds!"

White with fear, she turned to flee, and our hero, readjusting his disguise, stepped quickly after her.

Once or twice the scared maiden looked over her shoulder to see if he followed, but she never paused in her hurried flight. Passing through a richly perfumed olive-grove, she flew towards the quaint doorway of a house standing embowered amidst the trees, and had only gained a hasty admittance and slammed the door, when our hero was abruptly stopped by coming face to face with half a dozen fierce-bearded men; their sashes bristling with deadly weapons, and their shaggy brows wrathfully bent, as they glared upon the daring stranger, who had the insolent

hardihood to follow in the steps of the dark-eyed daughter of their race.

The first glance at the fierce countenances of the armed Turks convinced Captain Tom that they had detected his disguise.

He laid his hand on the hilt of his sword, as the foremost one, leveling a huge dirk at his breast, rushed at him, crying:

"Dog of an infidel, die!"

"Not by that thrust," our hero replied, as he quickly drew his sword, and skillfully turned the dirk aside, and with the rapidity of lightning, stabbed his powerful assailant to the heart.

The fall of their comrade was the signal for a furious and simultaneous attack on the part of the others.

With cries, giving vent to their rage, they pressed upon the youthful corsair so determinedly, that it required all his skill and swiftness to keep their thirsty blades at bay, as, step by step, they forced him backwards.

He had no time for thrusting in return.

His furious opponents crowded around him with unsparing ferocity, and though he managed to dispatch a second foe, he was already pricked in three places, his disguise was torn off, and bare-headed and exhausted, he was falling back from their continued attacks, when a tremendous blow, dealt him by his foremost antagonist, struck his guard down, and brought him to earth.

In that moment he was defenseless, and at the mercy of the Moslems, for, though he still grasped his sword, the revengeful blow had so benumbed his arm that he could no longer use it.

But his eyes glanced boldly at his assailants.

The thirsty cimeters were raised, and came swooping in the air—a murderous blade was within an inch of his heart—and the exultant shouts of his conquerors already proclaimed his doom—when the swift reports of two pistols rang from behind him, and before he could realize how he was saved, two of his fiercest foes were bleeding at his feet.

While he struggled to rise, a light form passed him—a slender arm was outstretched to grasp the deadly cimeter, which had fallen from the fierce Turk's hand, and as he stood on his feet, he saw the excited features and graceful figure of the corsair maiden, as she nobly threw herself between him and his remaining opponents.

Zeila's sudden appearance, and the fall of their two comrades, was quite enough for these two worthies, and contenting themselves with a howl of discordant rage, they rapidly took to flight.

"Zeila," our hero murmured, grasping the delicate arm of the devoted girl, "I owe you my life! How can I thank you?"

"By hastening from this place," the corsair maiden cried. "We are discovered and betrayed. Signal lights have been sent up from the shore, and already our vessel must be surrounded by the fleet. Every moment is one of danger."

Our hero's thoughts went to the old Moslem and the Sea Emerald.

"Are we alone on shore, then?" he asked.

"A part of your crew have landed. I ran here first—but if the enemy gets between us and our ship, we cannot leave the place alive."

"Then for the present, old Imaun Bey, that precious jewel must be left in your care: but when I come again, I will rid you of its burden."

He slashed the nearest trees with his sword that he might know the spot again, and suffered Zeila to lead him away.

Ben Barnacle, leading a portion of his disguised crew, met him as he left the cypress trees.

"Thank God I see you safe," a tear glistening in his honest eye; "this girl outstripped us all. Her coming was only in time," he added, glancing at the bodies of the dead Turks.

"What news from shore?" interrupted Tom.

"All depends on our speed; the alarm is given. But if we reach our ship, we shall not fear to run the gauntlet of the dreaded Dardanelles."

The straits of the Dardanelles are lined with forts, so placed that their artillery is calculated to destroy any passing ships. Many war vessels have been battered to pieces in attempting to pass without permission.

Captain Tom put himself at the head of his men, and at a quick pace they descended to the shore.

It was just getting dusk, and the sentinel from the nearest tower challenged them as they went by.

Our hero answered him in the name of the prophet, and they were allowed to pass to their boat unmolested.

No time was lost in embarking, and pulling away from the numerous *caiques*, or small boats of the Turks, they gained the side of the ship, on whose deck the rest of the boy-rovers were gathered, anxiously awaiting their leader's return.

A wave of the hand enjoined them to receive

him in silence, and Tom, handing Ben his sword, gave the word for instant sail.

A fleet of small armed vessels were creeping out from shore, and it was with contemptuous defiance of their power to interfere with him that our hero ordered his own far-famed banner to be run from the masthead.

As its folds fluttered in the air, the boom of a gun rolled across the smooth waters of Bosphorus, and a puff of smoke came from one of the advancing ships.

Just then a long, bony hand was laid on Tom's shoulder, and the snuffling tones of Dr. Shrike muttered in his ear:

"I'm ready to attend you, sir. I see they've taken a little of that hot blood out of you. My fine young captain, you'll get a scratch some of these days that'll let a little too much out of your active body."

"To the devil with your croaking!" cried the boy chieftain. "I need none of your help, Zeila can bind my scratches in her cabin."

"So—so," muttered the old blood-letter, with a chuckle; "and there'll be some scratches for me to bind up presently, or I've mistaken the mettle of the fleet that's creeping up to us. Ha!—there goes another gun. Jacob—Jacob! Get the sawdust spread in the cock-pit, and set up a skewer for the first head these corsairs cut off!"

CHAPTER XXV.

TERRIBLE VISIONS.

THE ships which drew near to engage Tom Drake were manned by piratical crews of the vilest description.

As they were many to one, they imagined an easy victory awaited them.

In this they erred sadly.

Their shot fell harmlessly upon the sides of the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, from which came a perfect storm of iron hail.

It was impossible to call it a fight, for the simple reason that by the time the second broadside had been hurled among the Turkish corsairs they were in full retreat.

Our hero did not attempt to give chase. He was too anxious to make the run of the Dardanelles before the formidable forts or the Turkish men-of-war stopped its passage.

Dr. Shrike was the only one who complained. There had not been enough death and carnage, or mutilation of limb for him.

Only one subject had been given him—a fair-faced boy—formerly midgy in the *Arethusa*.

He had been stricken to the deck by a spiked shot, and the cadaverous Jacob had already pounced on him, and borne him below.

"We should have scattered their feathers," Ben Barnacle observed, as he leaped down from the big gun he had been securing.

"Yes," Tom replied, "had they followed us, we could have blown them to pieces one by one."

"I hate craven-hearted foes," cried the hot-headed Harry Vere; "can't we do something to lure them on in a body. I had only begun to smell the fight."

"We must wait for another day," our hero replied. "We shall come here again. I must have that jewel," he added, mentally, "though I tear it from the heart of Imaun Bey."

A change in their rig was necessary before they neared the eagle eyes of the Dardanelles forts.

Their disguise having been skillfully assumed, Tom went below to await, with the utmost composure, their passage of a channel with so many dangers as to have been named the "Straits of Death."

The flush of excitement still burned on the young adventurer's brow.

His daring soul could not brook defeat in any degree, and he had set his heart upon the acquisition of the priceless jewel, with its history of blood.

His destiny, as he believed, had put him upon its scent, and he felt certain it was his destiny to be the possessor of the famous gem.

Come what might, he had sworn to wrest it from the grasp of Imaun Bey.

For once Zeila did not encourage his desperate purpose.

The Legend of the Sea Emerald had sunk deep in her heart.

She feared that its course of blood would cling to her idolized boy hero, and with the gentle tenderness of her nature, she strove to turn him from an enterprise that had so nearly proved fatal.

"There are other treasures as rare and priceless to be sought in the holds of corsair ships," she said, as she bandaged Tom's wounds, "treasures that have not this crime of blood upon them. Surely for one jewel you will not madly risk your life."

There were tears in the bright eyes of the corsair maiden as she softly pleaded.

Tom kissed her tenderly.

"You are growing weak, my Zeila," he said, with a smile.

The proud eyes of the Oriental maiden flashed. "Was I weak," she exclaimed, in a tone of subdued reproach, "when my hands wrenched the cimeter from your bloodthirsty enemy, and kept them at bay with its point at their hearts?"

"Forgive me, Zeila," Tom cried, "you are a brave girl, but you must not make me a coward. Is not danger a part of my career? Must I not dare death in some form each hour of my existence? Do not dissuade me, Zeila. This jewel has no ordinary attractions for me; I feel that its history is in some mysterious way linked with mine—that it must exercise some talismanic, perhaps terrible influence on my destiny. Though I have never seen it, I feel that I should know it at a glance. It flashes on my sight now, and I seem to see within its brightness a blood-red glare, that has a meaning for me alone, and which I must fathom."

"And it is because I fear so, too," Zeila replied, mournfully, "that I would counsel you to shun it as you would the coils of a serpent, beautiful to look upon, but deadly to touch."

"If it were death," Captain Tom exclaimed, "I would clutch it—if it eluded me to the depths of hades, I would follow in the chase, nor pause till my soul snatched it from the infernal fires!"

The corsair maiden, with her cheeks blanched and her eyes streaming, uttered a faint cry, and came and placed her finger on our hero's lips.

"Hush," she cried, "you chill my heart with fear—the demon of fate is gleaming in your eyes, and as you speak the wild laughter of fiends rings in my ears!"

The door of the cabin opened, and Dr. Shrike put his hideously grinning face in at the doorway.

"Just come to tell you about that boy who was hit with the spike shot," he mumbled, wrapping a cloth close around something his skinny hands held to his vest. "I've got his heart here. He wanted some message sent to his mammy, when he found he was done for, so I thought—"

"Vampire!" Zeila cried, springing to her feet, and rushing towards the callous-hearted old fellow. "Can you dare make sport of the tenderest feelings of that poor boy? Shame to you, coward! Give me this sad relic, it is not fit your foul hands should pollute it. Begone!"

Impetuously she tore the gory parcel from his claw-like fingers, and before he could mumble out a word, thrust him from the cabin, and shut the door.

Our hero's face grew graver as Zeila, with a sigh, came beside him.

"I feared his wound was mortal when I saw him struck," he said. "Poor boy, he was the gentlest of my crew, as devoted and brave as the most desperate man on board. I am sorry we have lost him, Zeila. I will go on deck. He shall have all we can give him now—a sailor's funeral."

"His noble heart shall not lie under the sea," Zeila cried. "I will embalm it. I have heard him talk to his messmates of his sisters and his mother. He had run away to sea against their will; they shall have this relic, all that is left of him, returned to them."

Our hero made no reply.

His heart was full.

Desperately daring as he was, the softer part of his nature was almost womanish in its tenderness.

He could look on unmoved when some stalwart and blood-thirsty foeman fell, bathed in his gore, but he never looked without remorse on the pale, cold face of any of his devoted boy crew as they lay still in death.

Nor could he repress the feeling, that if he had not led them on their wild career, they would not have run the hazard of such an untimely death.

The quiet form of the stricken boy was brought from below and placed in its last shrouding robe.

The spike-shot had torn part of his fair chest away, but the most terrible-looking gash was that made by the Vampire in removing the heart.

The boys, who had dearly loved their gentle messmate, gathered around to take a last look at his placid features, so calm and peaceful in their expression, that he seemed only sleeping, and when, amid mournful silence, he was consigned to the blue waves, their sorrowful glance followed his sinking form till it went out of sight, and sank to its lonely grave.

Dr. Shrike, with scalpel in hand, stood cynically watching the proceedings.

But the boys, incensed at his callous behavior, set upon him in a body, and amidst general ex-

clamations so worried him and his cadaverous assistant, that the pair were heartily glad when they could retreat to their cabin and lock the door upon their youthful tormentors.

Tom slept uneasily that night. He fancied himself in continual chase of the sea emerald.

At times it was tantalizingly near, but as often it eluded his clutch.

He went strange, weird journeys, with it dancing in front of him, urging him on like a demon hand.

And at last it was within his grasp, but even as he touched it its green glitter changed to a cluster of red fire, out of which a dozen of dancing demons leaped.

Then again, it became bubbling blood in his hands, and seemed to deluge him.

And while he looked, the pale, boyish face of him they had that day given to his ocean grave rose before him, pleading and white.

Then this, too, changed, and he looked upon the fierce, blood-stained visage and glaring eyes of the huge corsair whom he had slain when he took the Barbary ship, with Zeila on board.

As it had sunk then, so it now sunk beneath the dark waters, but, deep as it went, he could plainly see the murdered lineaments, and when it rested at the bottom the awfully staring eyes were still fixed upon him.

Strange monsters of the deep, with shining scales and eyes of fire, swam around the swarthy head, and a thrill went through Tom's heart when the dead, clammy hand of the giant pirate arose as if to brush them away.

This vision faded, too, and one more awfully thrilling replaced it.

The scene was the same—the deep bed of the ocean, with its caves of coral and floor of gems; but, instead of the pirate's features, he saw the pale, wan face of his mother.

Minnie Atherton was there, too.

Her arm was outstretched, pointing to his mother's bosom, where he could see a horrid gash—red and widening, with the slender stream of crimson bubbling forth, and tinging the waters around till they became of a ruddy hue.

Cold, beading sweat stood on our youthful hero's brow—in his sleep he groaned and tried to rise.

Presently the warning look in Minnie's eyes changed to one of terror, and as he struggled to break from the stupor which held him, the red waters changed to leaping flames, and the faces of Reuben Harpey, Sanderson, Captain Angel, and Reuben's mother arose distorted and malignant.

A wild shriek of agony smote upon his ears—his mother's face sank from his sight—a fearful crash succeeded, and then the whole scene vanished.

He gazed on a black, rugged coast.

The sea was beating fitfully against a blackened rock, at whose base lay, cold in death, the form of his beloved Minnie, and bending over her, with her once beautiful features distorted to a fiendish expression, was Zeila, the corsair maiden—her right hand grasping a keen dagger, from which the red drops fell on Minnie's lifeless breast.

Tom saw his own ship next—he was standing on her deck, directing her course towards the fearful coast.

Suddenly the air grew hot—the boards quivered under his feet—the masts came toppling about his ears—a frightful explosion succeeded, and the ship seemed to strike upon the rock.

He stood alone on his blazing deck, in the midst of raging flames.

With a sudden and mighty effort Tom broke the bonds of slumber, and sprang from the couch.

Standing erect in the middle of the cabin, he gazed wildly around, expecting to see some part of his dream realized before him.

But he was alone and safe.

His lamp was dimly burning, and he could see that everything in his cabin was as he had left it.

His cimeter hung within his reach—his rich apparel lay carelessly flung over a couch.

A goblet, still containing a draught of wine, stood untasted as he had left it on the table.

The ship was in gentle motion.

The waves rippled past the glazed port-holes of the cabin, and only their sullen murmur broke the silence of the ship.

All he had seen, then, was but a dream.

Yet why?

A warning?

He could not but feel it so.

Wiping the cold sweat from his forehead, he sat down to think.

His mother's face so strangely cold and wan!

What could that mean?

Was it that he had so long neglected her?

Minnie—his promised bride—lying pale and

bleeding on that ominous shore—the assassin, Zeila, his corsair attendant, bending over her!

Was that, then, to be the tragic end of her fatal love for him?

The bold heart of the daring boy was strangely troubled.

A cold thrill crept over it, and seemed to still its beatings.

Musingly he arose from his couch and attired himself, buckling his sword by his side, and still pondering on his dream.

One face he had missed from all those familiar ones.

Honest old John Gregory.

His kindly countenance was not amongst them.

This thought had barely crossed our hero's mind, when a peculiar sensation stole over his frame, and involuntarily his gaze was drawn to the furthest end of the cabin, there to be riveted on a vision that made him uncertain whether he was still dreaming.

A grayish mist pervaded that part of the cabin, and out of the mist distinctly seemed to rise the form and features of his uncle—John Gregory.

He only saw it for a moment, but its reproachful look went like an electric shock to his heart.

The vision, too, was so palpable, that the youthful rover uttered his uncle's name and sprang forward as if to grasp the worthy old fellow by the hand.

But even the gray mist was gone, and only a damp air played about our hero's brow.

There was something in all this.

Our hero was not superstitious—he was no coward.

Still there was an unaccountable tremor at his heart, not the quake of guilt or fear, but the thrill of a soul whose faith was strong in the after world.

He wandered up and down the cabin, trying to find some solution to the mystery; and then, with slow, thoughtful steps, he ascended to the deck.

His crew and officers, whose watch was on, were at their posts.

The ship was making good way through the waters—a clear, starlight sky was overhead.

Nothing appeared more distinct than any idea of danger; yet it was with gloomy brow and oppressed mind that our hero walked the deck till morning light.

With the first flush of daybreak, Zeila, fresh and charming from her luxurious bath, came from her chamber.

She looked very lovely as she tripped gracefully towards the young chief, but the memory of his dream was vivid on his mind.

He saw in her, not the brave-hearted maiden who had risked her life to rescue him, and would gladly have died for him, but the revengeful murderess, steeped in the blood of his betrothed bride; and when she came to welcome him, with the glad light of love in her lustrous eyes, and a soft greeting on her lips, he thrust her coldly from him, and passed her sternly by.

If the corsair maiden had been stung by a venomous serpent, hidden in that hand she had striven to kiss, she could not have sprung more suddenly aside.

All the gay look went from her face; her cheeks grew white and cold; a tremor chilled her bounding form, and with a startled moan she shrank shivering away.

A timid, startled glance she gave him, and then, with her dark orbs swimming in tears, silently and sorrowfully went to her cabin, to weep unseen.

All that day she remained out of sight, but toward evening Jenny Vere, who had tried to soothe her grief, took her by the hand, and led her to Tom's cabin.

Our hero's heart was thrilled with remorse at the sight of Zeila's sad face.

He outstretched his arms, and, with a joyous cry, the corsair girl flung herself on his breast.

She did not move after she had nestled there.

He raised her head.

She was in a deep swoon.

After he had kissed her back to consciousness, he told her of his dream.

A strange look settled on her face as she listened, and she entwined her supple form around his dauntless breast, as if to shield him from some subtle peril.

But when he told her of his vision of her as the murderess of Minnie, the strange look deepened, and a peculiar, frozen look settled on her damask cheek.

Tom saw that an icy shiver convulsed her delicate frame.

The next day came, and saw them far from any danger of meeting with their Oriental foes.

As day after day took them nearer England, the boys began to wonder wistfully whether they were to make a run to the land of their birth—the land

whose flag they had defied, but where they had left friends whom they dearly longed to see.

It was, therefore, amidst ringing cheers the news was received that they were homeward-bound.

Our hero's dream had worked its influence upon him, and, regardless of danger, he was determined to visit England once more.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A FEARFUL DOOM.

ARRIVING near Algiers, they were becalmed for a day; but as soon as the wind freshened they fell in with a raft which had been tossing about for days on the sea.

So its sole occupant, a brawny English sailor, with anything but an honest face to recommend him, stated when he was hauled on board, in a very hungry and exhausted state.

Plied with biscuit and rum by the good-natured boys, he became furiously attached to them, swore he hated the service, and vowed he was willing to incur death in any shape, if he could only be suffered to remain in such comfortable quarters.

Ben Barnacle, who trusted none till he was assured of their honesty, would not allow him to be sworn in as one of their band.

He allowed him to work as an able seaman, so the real character of their vessel was thus concealed.

With this the castaway, who called himself Noll Garner, and said he had run away from his ship, seemed content.

He proved an easy-going mariner, never straining himself by overwork; in fact, the boys made his incapacity for the true work of the ship a laughing stock; he was in no ways bad tempered, and allowed himself to be made the butt of their jokes, and to be kicked and cuffed for their laziness, without manifesting any displeasure.

He had a curious turn of mind, had this Noll Garner, and often he might have been seen prowling quietly about, inspecting the different appurtenances of the ship with apathetic interest.

And one day, when the ship was off Malta, this curious turn of mind led him to sneak unseen down the gangway, and explore the passage leading to the powder magazine.

Not content with this, he in the same spirit of investigation, managed to open the door with a skeleton key, and snugly ensconce himself among the barrels, where, seated at his ease, he loosened one of the staves, and strewed a quantity of the powder around.

Then, but with a little more trepidation in his manner, he untwisted a piece of prepared rope well steeped in inflammable matter, and boring holes in the nearest barrels, inserted a strand of the rope in each. Creeping on tiptoe, and anxiously listening for any sound of danger, the skulking villain, whose design was to blow up the ship and its boy crew, took a slow match from his vest pocket, lighted it at one end, blue the spark carefully—very carefully—shielding it with his hand from the scattered gunpowder, and laid it down so that the unlighted end came in contact with the prepared rope.

All was nicely done so far, the train was beautifully laid; the prepared rope was in contact with the barrels; the slow match was lighted—it would burn one hour, and then there would be a bang, and ship, spars, masts, beams, cannons, cargo and all, with its bold crew of adventurers, and their dashing leader, would go up with the explosion into the air, and come down again in pieces that could not be put together.

The traitor paused to rub his hands gleefully, and chuckle at his success.

He had been well paid for his dastardly deed—well paid by the old Jew, Israel Shawm, who, hearing with dismay that Captain Tom Drake had escaped his treacherous snare, and apprehensive of the boy's vengeance, bribed this unscrupulous ally with a handsome reward to effect the destruction of the ship and all on board.

Noll Garner's uncouth visage puckered up in delight as he stepped to the doorway.

Now to ascend quietly.

They were near the harbor of Malta. A plank thrown overboard, he could leap upon it, and in safety witness the blowing up of the vessel and her unsuspecting crew.

Not so fast, Noll Garner.

Watchful eyes are on board the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*—watchful eyes and active hearts.

Such movements were not likely to be unseen by those whose duty it was to protect the vessel against a hundred such dangers.

Now Noll Garner had been watched, suspected, followed, and now, at his heels were half a dozen of the boy-adventurers, who, with their youthful chief, informed of all, sprang down the ladder, and sword in hand, burst into the magazine, as the traitor was in the act of opening the door.

The entry was so sudden that Noll Garner had barely time to give vent to a startled "Oh!" and open his wide jaws to their fullest extent, before Tom had borne him to the floor, and while his heel crushed out the lighted match, forced his sword point an inch into the ruffian's throat.

He yelled in the wildest terror while Tom pricked him again and again.

Then the boys rushed into the magazine, and the shaking wretch was in a trice bound and dragged from the place.

The discomfited traitor shook in every limb. His eyes rolled wildly on his captors, as they carried him on deck.

His tongue, parched and swollen with fear, protruded from his mouth.

In feeble, palsied tones, he mumbled for mercy—implored them to stop the bleeding from his coward throat.

Of course a deaf ear was turned to his pleadings, and quaking at the prospect of his dreadful fate, he was flung to his knees on the fore-castle.

He had heard terrible rumors of the boy-cruisers' ruthlessness—of the tortures they inflicted on their prisoners.

What could he expect but the worst as his fate?

It was not without coercive persuasions that the Jew had induced him to attempt the hazardous enterprise—and now his most horrible anticipations had been realized.

The carrying out of his sentence alone remained.

Would he be shot?

Would he be slowly hanged?

Would he be cast into boiling tar?

His eyes gazed frenziedly around.

No sign of Captain Tom.

One man approached him—the vampire, Dr. Shrike.

He came with the steady tread of the executioner, and after him came his gaunt attendant, Jacob.

Noll Garner howled in agony.

The vampire's eyes, piercing like red-hot gimlets, were fixed upon him.

He strode up before the culprit, and took forth a case of instruments.

"So—so," he began, "this is the fine young man who wanted to blow us all up into the air. Soul of Galen! what hot brains he must have, Jacob!"

As his assistant approached, the vampire pulled off Noll Garner's cap.

His claw-like fingers fastened themselves in the fellow's shaggy hair, and Noll Garner gave a howl of agony.

"Take this nightcap, Jacob," said the imperturbable doctor; "they'll bring him a warmer one directly. Ho, ho, ho! he, he! blow up the ship—oho! he, he!"

The vampire chuckled.

He still had his fingers on the traitor's hair.

Slowly he began to clip.

Clip—clip—clip.

The shaggy hair began to fall to the deck.

Great God! was he to be scalped alive?

He tried to escape the torturing scissors.

They seemed red hot.

But the middies held him firmly, and, in a short time, his hair was cropped close.

Then the vampire began a process of scraping, which seemed to tear off his scalp at every draw.

It was horribly torturing.

Huge drops of sweat poured down his quivering cheeks.

"Mercy—mercy!" he bellowed. "I am not tried yet."

"Bring the nightcap, Jacob. We shall have him tried. Ho—ho—oho! blow up the ship, ho—ho! ho!"

The vampire chuckled, and laid down his scraping-iron.

The scalp of his victim was smooth as a shell. But every pore was open and full of agony.

He tried to surmise what the "nightcap" could be. Some fearful torture, he did not doubt, to which the vampire so jocularly alluded.

He was not long in doubt.

Jacob appeared, taking from the hands of a sailor a metal pan full of steaming hot tar.

That was the nightcap.

The craven wretch shrieked for mercy when he saw it.

His knees sank under him.

Terror convulsed his livid cheeks.

The vampire enjoyed the terror of his victim.

Slowly and remorselessly he went on with the punishment.

Slowly he poured the hot tar on the sensitive scalp of the ruffian, paying no heed to his cries and struggles, till the punishment was complete, and Noll Garner lay senseless, huddled, and convulsed.

When the vampire said, drily, and with a low chuckle:

"Put the smelling-bottle to his nose, Jacob."

No one saw what it was the second of those callous tormentors applied.

But its effect was thrilling.

It no sooner touched the ruffian's nostrils, than he broke from his swoon of agony, and leaped bolt upright.

His eyes were starting from their sockets, his teeth chattered audibly, his bondaged hands clenched till the nails pierced the flesh, his whole body quivered in a fearful tremor.

The vampire coughed and chuckled as he sidled away.

His chosen part of the punishment was accomplished.

All that remained now was speedily done.

Four of Tom's crew bound the shaking wretch to a plank, and he was dropped over the side.

They heard a horrible cry, as the cool waters hissed over the scalding tar; then the plank righted itself, and the convulsed visage, with its starting eyeballs, rose above the waves.

Slowly it went towards the harbor with its tortured burden, and the gallant bark of the boy-adventurers, escaped from the treacherous peril, sailed gracefully on her way.

The punishment of the traitor was a terrible one, but his meditated crime sent out mercy from every heart.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A LETTER FROM MINNIE.

TOM having a trusted agent at Gibraltar determined to put in there, and with the aid of a stiff breeze, the gallant bark soon lay peacefully at anchor.

There were a great many communications awaiting him—letters informing him of the intentions of the authorities to take him at any risk, and warning him of the plans by which they hoped to effect their object.

These Tom put aside with contemptuous indifference.

He had defied the authorities too often to regard their attempts to capture him.

Several letters from Minnie Atherton were there; letters couched in the tenderest language, and breathing the warmest love for him.

The last one he took up, in her fair handwriting, and which bore the latest date, made his cheeks flush hot with anger, and caused his hand to instinctively clutch his sword.

It ran as follows:

"MY DARLING TOM:—I know not whether you will receive this letter, for Lady Castlemaine has openly turned against me because I have refused to forsake you; has shut me up in this lonely place by myself, and set so close a watch upon my actions, that I fear the discovery of my attempt to send you this may result in my being removed to some place where you will never find me.

"She wishes me to marry an Irish nobleman, called Lord Kilerew, and has made him promise that he will have you taken and tried, and executed, unless I become his wife.

"And that dreadful man, Sanderson, and your cousin, Reuben Harpy, have been here. I overheard their interview. Dear Tom, you cannot think what wicked things they have done.

"They have shut up poor Uncle Gregory in a mad-house, and all they want now is to find his will, in which I have discovered he has made you his heir. They have tried to make him confess where he has put it, so that you may never come into the property, and I am fearful they will kill him if he does not tell.

"Dear Tom, if you could come and rescue me from this dreadful place, I think I could describe where the mad-house is, and then you and your brave people could get in and help your poor old uncle out before they cruelly beat him to death.

"But you must disguise yourself, for so many persons are ready to betray you, and get the reward, besides all these enemies; but you are so brave I should not mind your coming here—although Lady Castlemaine did try to persuade me to get you to come here, that she might have soldiers in ambush to capture you.

"She has cruelly used me for refusing such a wicked plot, and has told me that I shall be made to marry Lord Kilerew, whether I consent or not. So, dearest Tom, if you can come and help me away from their power I shall be safe, but if I am left much longer here, you may never find me, and I would sooner die than have you forsake me or love another."

The letter concluded with a fervent appeal to him to hasten to her deliverance; there was a postscript, too, which told him she had just been visited by Lady Castlemaine, who had striven, by

every species of threats and ill-usage, to get her consent to the hated marriage.

This decided Tom. He returned on board and startled even Ben Barnacle, with the unexpected and to him mad order:

"Make all sail for Portsmouth!"

"Back to England?" queried Ben.

"Ay, and let the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* do her very best," and with a clouded brow, the young chief went below.

Aware of the dangers that menaced him at every step, when once he came within hail of England, Tom laid aside his cocked hat and well-known uniform, and in the undress of a young lieutenant, went ashore, and having bidden adieu to Ben Barnacle and Harry Vere, who accompanied him so far, set off with the faithful Bob Hauler on his perilous mission.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE YELLOW ALLIGATOR.

Tom's purpose in hazarding a visit on shore was to discover the whereabouts of Admiral Lord Kill-crew, for he naturally reasoned that if he were still at sea, Lady Castlemaine could not force Minnie to become his bride.

He was also in quest of intelligence concerning his uncle, poor old John Gregory.

How he succeeded in both matters, will be by-and-by related.

For the present we must leave him, and repair to the "Yellow Alligator," an old-fashioned inn situated a few miles from Portsmouth.

It was a queer, dilapidated old house.

The Cavaliers and Puritans had alternately lodged there in King Charles's time, and rumor reported it to have, upon one occasion, given shelter and concealment to the Young Pretender, when his merciless foes were pursuing him to the death.

During the troublesome beginning of the war then raging against Napoleon, it had been the resort of all sorts of characters.

Here the press-gang inveigled their victims, and officers of justice waited to waylay highwaymen and pirates, who were expected, and on whose heads blood-money was placed.

As might have been expected, its landlord, Zachariah Magpie, was a queer old stick.

He had been a Kentuckian, and fought in the first war of independence.

Six foot two he stood in his boots.

His body was lank and slim, his limbs seemed too long even for his body—he had a game eye, which rolled quaintly in its socket, and his hands hung down like the paws of a gorilla.

But, for all that, Zachariah Magpie was a dangerous customer to meddle with.

One way or the other he had been of use to the authorities, and so they overlooked the playful knack he had of pitching any man who offended him out of a window, or spitting him against the gate with a pitchfork.

Mrs. Zachariah Magpie was a worthy partner of such a man.

She weighed at least 218 pounds, and had a fist like a leg of mutton.

It was getting towards evening, and the old man was behind his primitive bar, dispensing liquors to his customers, when two well-known thief-takers and officers of justice walked in.

Old Zachariah knew that they never came his way unless they had some business in hand.

They had once walked off a particular favorite of his, and he never saw their ill-looking mugs without feeling an inclination to smother them in the cask out of which he drew his beer.

But prudence compelled him to be outwardly civil.

"Good-day, Jonas," he said to the ugliest one. "Falkerklate it's a long day since you turned up here, and you, too, Master Matthews; still I'm glad to see yer. Come, what'll yer take?"

The fellow whom he had addressed as Jonas gave his confederate a significant leer.

"We'll take the bloke as we're looking after, won't we, Bill, eh?"

"Like to," quoth the other, as Zachariah handed them the jug of beer.

Zachariah leaned his brawny elbows on the bar.

"Well, my kiddies, and who's the unlucky coon you're kinder after now?"

"Oh, we don't tell you all our business," replied Matthews; "you ain't one of the right sort for us to do that with."

"May I go slick down an alligator's throat if I ever ask you a civil question again," growled the landlord as he mixed a mint julep and drank.

"Oh, Zachariah, won't peach on us," said Jonas. "Besides, I don't suppose he's seen or heard of our bird."

"Is it a land-crab or a water-shark?" asked Zachariah.

"Both, I think. Some devil of a son of a pop-gun. Leastways, he's always popping out of the way when he's wanted to be nabbed. But I think we'll have him this time, eh, Matthews?"

Matthews grunted out some hopeful reply, and went on with his beer.

"Yes," continued Jonas, "he's got the cheek of the old 'un to come here at all, when there's such a mob on the look out for him. But we've had the straight tip, and he'll be nabbed before night, as sure as his name is Captain Tom Drake."

Zachariah turned up his eyes in the least expressible manner.

"Guess I've heard of that coon before to-day, I have," he observed. "Seems a slippery kind of a greasy eel, that you can't get by the tail."

"Oh, we shall get him, I'll bet; and then he may make up his mind that it's good-night with him."

"Why, stranger?" asked Zachariah, "what'll they do with him?"

Jonas made a motion of passing his fingers around his throat, ending with a jerk, typical of hanging.

"That's what they'll do with him," he said; "but guess it ain't no business of ours, so long as we swags the ready, eh, Matthews?"

"No odds at all; come on, drink up. We're wasting time when we ought to be on his track."

The worthy pair of blood-hunters drank up and departed.

Zachariah watched them swagger out of sight. His face puckered up in a peculiar expression of coarse jocularity and strong contempt.

"Yes, toddle off, yer varmint coons," he soliloquized; "but if ever he's took by the likes of you, I'll eat my own head off without any salt. You take him! yes, yer tarnal pair of blowpipes. I guess if yer don't find you've cotched a sarpint, when yer do get paws on him, I ain't never knowed the habits of the critter—not at all—oh, no—not at all."

Old Zachariah drained off his mint julip with a chuckle.

One of the thief-takers at that instant returned. "Halloo, scorpion!" was on the old fellow's lips, but he checked himself, and merely looked up as he said:

"Turned in again, Jonas?"

"Yes. Come back to leave this here; it's his description, and cautions against any of His Majesty's subjects, not to harbor him under a penalty of imprisonment for life."

"Harbor'im," bellowed Zachariah, "me harbor such riptiles?"

"Oh, I don't suppose you'd do that, but it's a caution, and so I'll just stick it up against this wall."

"Just stick it up wherever yer please!" exclaimed the landlord, "and put another outside; maybe it'll bring me customers. Have some of this paste?"

"Thanks; there, anyone can read it now, and I say, Zach, you see what the reward is. If he should give us the slip, and come down here, there's only us three; we can divide the swag, you understand?"

"Tarnation well. Say, Jonas, going anywhere's special to nab him?"

Jonas placed the thumb of his right hand against his nose, and extending the fingers towards Zachariah, made a significant grimace and departed.

He had evidently made up his mind not to be caught napping.

An hour or so after, while Zachariah was thoughtfully sipping another mint julip, his wife came bouncing like a young avalanche into the bar.

Her first act was to hit him a tremendous blow in the pit of the stomach with her fat hand, and dislodge the grateful draught he had just imbibed.

Her next was to clutch the glass from his hand, and drain the contents.

"Guzzling again," she cried, "guzzle—guzzle—guzzle! I should like to know when you mean to leave off guzzling all the profits, and intend to take to your business like an honest man, instead of a big-bellied, blown-out whale—you guzzling sponge, you."

"Tarnation devils!" gasped Zachariah; "say, missus, don't come that again with this child, or there'll be mischief."

"Mischief! there'll be mischief enough if I let you have your own way, you idling, guzzling sneak of a thief, spending all your days over the bar, lolloping with your fine companions, who'd drink the place out at elbows, drink me out of house and home, and you'd not care a straw."

Zachariah might have added that the quantity he guzzled in improving the trade, was nothing to what she put away up-stairs, but he didn't, and Mrs. Magpie's fiery eye happening to alight on the proclamation which the officer had pasted up, her indignation took a new turn.

"Ha! another of them skulking reprobates

hiding from the law, and I suppose you'd shelter him, and give him meat and drink, as you did that vile highwayman you put in my room last time the officer came here; but let me tell you, this viper—this whatever his name is—oh, Tom. A pretty name for such a villain. I'll betray him. I'll shriek out that he's here if he dares to put one foot inside my house—I swear I will, as I'm an honest woman!"

Two strangers sauntered in at that moment.

They were both cloaked, and appeared to have come some distance.

One, the younger of the two, who was attired in the undress of a young naval lieutenant, was evidently of authority, for the other kept at a respectful distance, and once or twice seemed about to make him some salutation, when a glance from the other checked him.

While they were being served with liquor, the younger sauntered up to the proclamation, and leisurely read it.

He was a good-looking young fellow, almost a youth, though with bigger whisker and mustache than might have been expected from his age.

After having perused the whole announcement, he turned to the landlady, and said, with a smile

"Some desperate marauder. Not expected here, I trust?"

"Expected here?" Mother Magpie almost shrieked; "no, sir—bless you, no, sir; I should say not indeed—the terrible ruffian!"

"He appears to be a most terrible desperado—an unmitigated villain, judging by the announcement."

"He is, sir, a bloodthirsty wretch. Heaven grant he may never darken my threshold."

Just the faintest vestige of a smile puckered up old Zachariah's long visage.

"Well, stranger," he remarked, "seems as how we mightn't know the varmint, even if he did come here."

Mother Magpie almost shrieked.

"Not know him, Zachariah—how can you? I am sure I should know him the instant he set his foot on the doorstep. Don't you think I should, sir, with my instincts of bad people?"

That quiet smile again flitted around Zachariah's lips.

"Well, well," he said gruffly, "don't let's bother the gentleman. Perhaps he'd like to sit down."

"My best room is at your service," cried the politely-smirking landlady. "Walk this way, sir, if you please. It's a pleasure to offer such a gentleman my humble shelter—a pleasure to see you, sir, when such bloodthirsty marauders are about. Walk in, sir; who knows but even now the villain might be lingering within ear-shot."

"Ah!" Zachariah exclaimed, gravely, "who knows, indeed."

A close observer might have detected a knowing kind of wink in the corner of Zachariah's eye.

But Mother Magpie was already leading the way to their own snug little room, and the youthful wayfarer, gaining the noisy-tongued woman's good opinion by his gentle acquiescence in all that she said, followed her, his companion walking in company with Zachariah.

A bright fire was burning in the room, and the hostess, taking down glasses and decanters, bade her guests be seated, and ordered her husband to get some of his best wine.

Zachariah soon returned, with a cobwebbed bottle in each hand.

"Be merry, stranger," he said, placing the bottles on the table. "You'll find the wine tasty, and there's no fear of that desperate pirate, Captain Tom Drake, getting in here, any way."

He winked knowingly at the young stranger, whose handsome features flushed as the landlord spoke.

"Zachariah," cried his worthy partner, "if you mention his very name I shall have spasms."

The youthful guest smiled.

"Come," he said, filling his glass, "let me pledge our kind hostess in a bumper, Madame, your sweetest health, and may all robbers and pirates be kept from your door."

The landlady made the best courtesy her 218 pounds of flesh would permit.

She was flushed and pleased.

"Was ever such a well-spoken gentleman?" she cried. "Zachariah, how ill-mannered you are. Fill your glass, and drink the gentleman's health."

Very quaintly did Zachariah fill his glass.

Very quaintly did he, with his one game eye, cocked to a curious expression, glance over the rich ruby fluid at his guest.

"Strangers," he said, "old Zachariah drinks your health, and may you never need a more snug shelter than he can give you."

The younger of the new comers gave him a quick glance.

But old Zachariah's face was half hidden as he let the grateful juice gurgle down his capacious throat.

Hardly had he set the glass down, when a noisy scuffling of feet was heard outside.

Mother Magpie gave a spasmodic start.

Old Zachariah looked gravely around.

"Now, then, you old yellow alligator," exclaimed a voice outside, "come out, will you, or we'll precious quick come in, I can tell you."

"Dame," said the landlord, "somebody calls you."

Mother Magpie's full round face flushed the color of a raw beefsteak.

"Well, if ever I heard the like, to be insulted under my own roof, and you to stand there and famely hear that—there, don't go; I'll soon see whether I keep open house for this or no."

The excited landlady pushed past her husband, and was presently heard in high altercation with some one outside.

"Oh, no good!" a man's voice exclaimed; "tell yer he's been tracked here. We're officers of justice, and we means to search."

"And if you try to search here," screamed the landlady, in reply, "I'll claw the scalp off your beastly skulls."

"What do you mean, woman?" was the reply. "I'll tell you a harboring pirates and setting the officers of justice at defiance won't do them nor you any good."

"Strangers," observed Zachariah, gently, as his better half's voice was heard screeching in reply, "them's officers on the lookout. They're unwelcome varmints at all times, and if you'd like not to see 'em, why, there's a corner in my house where they may stare the eyes out of their heads and not smell a scrap of your skin."

He looked meaningly at the younger traveler as he spoke.

"Oh, no, thank you," replied the other, carelessly, "they will not interfere with our comforts I assure you."

Old Zachariah looked surprised, but said no more.

Mother Magpie came bounding heavily into the room, her eyes blazing, her voice thick.

"You, Zachariah!" she shrieked, "there is a thief of a sneak—officer of justice he calls himself—I'll justice him with a warming-pan about his ugly ears—says we're a-harboring that Captain Tom Drake, the pirate, and says he'll search the house—my house, Zachariah. But let him attempt it—let the insignificant puppy, the sniveling sneak, the pitiful cur, attempt it, and I'll show him what's what, I will."

"Well, my dear, put in Zachariah, "if them officer coons like to be darned jackasses, and want to search our house, why, tarnation pippins, let 'em; we'll give 'em leave to eat all they find, and much good may it do all their skins, the tarnation cusses."

"Oh, indeed, a pretty thing; and so you will allow your house to be turned upside down, and your wife too, perhaps, you'll allow to be turned upside down—I said upside down, did you hear, Zachariah? Rummaged all over, with their beastly noses prying into every corner."

"Snakes and crocodiles!" exclaimed Zachariah, who evidently misunderstood his better half, "I shouldn't think any critters would want to do that."

"Oh, and that's all you have to say; a pretty landlord you, and these gentlemen disturbed in this way."

"I assure you, madame, they will not disturb us in the least," observed the younger traveler; "I should let them search the place if they wish to do so."

"Of course," chimed in Zachariah, "don't want 'em to think you won't let 'em in because you are harboring malefactors—do you, eh?"

"Me harbor malefactors? Here, you spy—you pitiful imitation, you sneaking Paul Pry, walk in. Begin your search; there's some gentlemen here—perhaps they're the pirates. Pray come in, and pray see if you can discover your beautiful Tom—your precious Tommy. I said Tommy, you thieves, I did!"

The last words were a perfect squeal of fury.

"Yes," chimed Zachariah, who, for some reasons of his own, was only making believe to be at ease, "walk in, you young snakes and alligators. Here you'll find the spotted jackass eating his tarnal toes off, and the big baboon a-cutting his blessed corns."

Whether he alluded to himself, his worthy partner, or his two guests, was not clear.

The officers entered—two low-looking, ill-bred blood-hunters—their faces stamped by cunning greed. Neither of them were Jones or Matthews. Others there were on our hero's track.

"Look sharp in there," cried a surly voice; "no use your hiding away. Dead or alive, we mean to have him."

The officers looked cautiously around.

"Don't want to put you out of the way, Zachariah," said the foremost, "but bizness is bizness, and dooty is dooty; we've been on the trail of Captain Tom Drake, and he's expected here; so, if he ain't here now, he's on the road; but in case he should be here, we means to make all safe—don't we, Jem?"

"No mistake," retorted Jem.

"I'll break your ill-looking jaws, I will!" screamed Mrs. Magpie, seizing a heavy decanter.

"Better patch up your own ill-looking mug first, ma'am."

"You villain—take that! I'll teach you to insult me here, you white-livered sneak, that I will!"

With a fearful crash she hurled the decanter at the officer's head.

Had it struck him it must have knocked his brains out; but he ducked in time to let it shiver in atoms against the wall.

Mrs. Magpie took up another with the same intent, and old Zachariah got between her and the object of her rage.

"Look here, critters," he said to the officers, "you've come to look after a pirate, so you are, some—jest do that, and go you tarnation ways; but as to speakin' ag'in' my missis, do it, an' snakes an' kangaroos! I'll pitch yer by the scurf of the neck out of the window!"

Zachariah stretched himself up till his six feet odd looked more than their full measure.

He looked dangerous to tamper with.

The officer was cowed, and said no more to the infuriated landlady.

"These gentlemen will excuse us," one said, "but we must ax their names, and where they come from."

"Yes," squealed Mrs. Magpie; "and their mammys' names, and their grandmothers' names, you sneaks you."

"My dear madam," observed the younger of the travelers, "these men are only obeying their orders; as an officer myself, bearing his Majesty's commission, it is part of my duty to assist them in their search; and much as I should regret joining in any disturbance under your hospitable roof, I should be compelled, were this boy pirate to show himself, to help take him prisoner. I am sure these good men will only do their duty, and no more."

He drew a small packet from his breast and displayed it open to the officers.

"You will see by this that I am Lieutenant Clifford, of the *Neptune*. This gentleman has been my traveling companion—he ships with me; and now, having satisfied you about ourselves, I hope you will excuse me from accompanying you on your search. Should I be fortunate enough to help you capture him, we shall travel together; if not, I may see you at Portsmouth, when I hope to use my influence to increase your reward, should you take him."

The officers touched their caps.

"We beg pardon for intruding," they began.

"Don't name it. Nay, we are all comrades under the king—drink to his health."

He filled out their glasses, and refilling his to the brim, drank to the dregs.

"There," exclaimed the irascible landlady, "perhaps now you will come bundling in upon people, looking for your pirate; perhaps you'll say again that one of these gentlemen might be him."

"Don't never know, ma'am; he's like the devil, and takes a good many shapes, don't he, sir? And besides, here's his description, and it is a little like this young gentleman."

"Pooh!" cried the landlord, knocking the document from his hand, "you're a fool."

The young lieutenant smiled, displaying a handsome set of teeth.

"I hope I am not too much like him," he said, gayly; "but I had heard he was a ferocious monster, with fangs besmeared with blood."

"Oh, no, sir; he is, so they say, a perfect chick to look at; but, chick or no chick, there's a good many been a long while on the look-out for him, and now he's put his foot in it by comin' on shore, if me and Jem don't nab him, others will—there ain't no fear of his dodging off again."

"Well,"—the young officer poured out more wine—"I hope, my worthy fellows, you may get him; but I am afraid you won't find him here—drink!"

"Much obliged to you, kind sir, but we musn't take no more; afeard we shan't know him when we see him. It'll be a tough job when we nabs him; howsomdever, we'll give a look around, like. P'raps, ma'am, you'll show us around."

"Show you!" screeched Mrs. Magpie. "Me show you, indeed!—catch me!"

Zachariah chuckled, the young traveler laughed, and the officers left the room.

Then, and not till then, did old Zachariah seem more at ease.

To observe him closely, one would have thought

that our hero was indeed somewhere under his roof.

The irascible hostess could not content herself with staying behind.

She followed after the officers, giving them the length of her tongue till they had been all over the place, and had reluctantly determined to depart, when, with derisive satisfaction, she hissed them off her doorway, calling all the grinning yokels from the tap-room to hoot the discomfited officers till they were out of distance.

Mrs. Magpie came back to the snug parlor with a face like pickled cabbage.

"There!" she exclaimed, as she triumphantly squatted down in the only chair that would bear her weight; "that's the last of them."

Old Zachariah cocked his game eye to a comical expression, and a genial smile flitted about his lips.

When an hour or so had passed the lieutenant's companion, taking advantage of the landlady's absence to serve customers, hinted that they had better be gone.

"Strangers," said Zachariah, "if you'll take a trapper's advice, you'll lie tarnal quiet where you are, for thar's them about as is more dangerous than scotched rattlesnakes, and a tarnal sight more cunning than vipers. I guess yer are in comfortable quarters, like, and if I was ye, I'd stay till daylight afore I went further."

The same significant look beamed a moment from the old fellow's eyes, and he did not seem surprised when the travelers decided to stay.

The discussion of another bottle brought them to the hour of retiring, and after they had wished their hostess good-night, old Zachariah conducted them to their rooms.

The sleeping apartment to which he led the younger traveler was a large, rambling, square-cornered chamber of very antique construction.

A monstrous wooden bedstead stood at one end, a large chest of drawers at the other end, and all the other furniture was of the most primitive and massive construction.

A big, uncouth-looking window, with bars across the thick shutters outside, took up nearly half the wall on one side, and an immense fireplace was on the other.

"Tain't the best-looking corner in the shed," the landlord observed, as if by way of apology, "but it's tarnation convenient, and you may make up your mind to sleep comfortable till I calls you."

"Thanks," said the young stranger, divesting himself of his cloak and naval jacket, "I shall rise with cock-crow."

The landlord lingered as if he wanted to say more.

He stood opposite the noble form of his youthful guest, and looked him keenly, though respectfully, in the face.

"Stranger," he said, "tain't in me to pry into yer secrets, or to offer my counsel like, but if yer should hear a tarnal row in the night, and shouldn't want to be seen here, yer have only to touch that knob at the back of yer head, and you'll go out of sight; only jump off the bedstead arter it's done; it's a tarnation walk through the floor."

With these words, the old fellow was about to retire, but the young sailor, by a quiet, graceful movement, indicated him to stay.

"Zachariah," he said, in an altered, pleasant voice, that fell like magic music on the staunch old Kentuckian's ears, "I have not mistrusted your fidelity nor forgotten when I was last here; look at me as I am."

He removed his disguise of whiskers, eyebrows, etc., and revealed the handsome, boyish features of Captain Tom Drake.

Old Zachariah did not seem a whit surprised; if anything he was a little affected.

"Stranger," he said, "you're jest a brave kinder coon, and that's what yer are. I knowed ye the first time I heard yer voice; for I haven't all forgot when I used my ears on the trail of the Injuns. Wal, I reckon you've the stomach of an alligator; tip us your fin, and cuss me, I'm glad to see yer."

Tom grasped his hand warmly.

"I was sure of a welcome here," he said; "poor madame did not even suspect me."

"She—why, she ain't no more seelt of a human critter than a walrus with its blowing hole stuffed up; and if she had, with all her ways, she let her flesh get torred off her back afore she'd betray you, and that's saying a tarnal good deal, it are."

"It is, indeed; and now, my worthy friend, leave me. I need not conceal from you that I am pursued, and expect to be tracked here by more keen-scented blood-hunters than the precious pair who have just left."

"And if you are, when you hear 'em battering ag'in the door, you'll know whereto go. I shan't be in a hurry to let 'em in, and maybe they'll kinder knock ag'in summut on their way; and I

shan't nary come to wake yer, anyways, for I know yer have as quick ear as a hunted Injun, and the spring of a young lion when you're roused. So stranger, good-night, and a tough 'un yer are, as I allers said you'd be."

Once more he gripped Tom's hand.

"A moment," our hero said; "has anything further transpired about my mother?"

"Nothing since that infernal yarn of her having bolted."

Tom's cheeks flushed.

"I will force that lie down their throats yet. My uncle, has anything been heard of him?"

"Wall—yaas—they've got cheeky, and it's said he's in a sort of Bedlam."

"By Heavens, I will rescue him from his cowardly keepers, if I have to thrust my sword down their brutal throats."

"I kalkerlate yer will; but just take an old sarpint's advice. When yer are going there, don't let 'em smell yer comin', or yer may find when you gits him out that he's mad enough to all eternity."

Cheerily bidding the bold boy good-night, the landlord of the "Yellow Alligator" quitted the apartment, and our hero threw himself on the bed, to snatch a few hours' repose, and was almost instantly in a sound slumber.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ONE THOUSAND POUNDS REWARD.

Two o'clock had just struck from the neighboring church clock the solemn hour when the ghosts, who have been flitting about the damp church-yard since midnight's chimes, are warned to go back to their damp winding sheets and damper graves.

Two o'clock; the cocks, waiting in doubt between the moonlight and the faint peep of day, began to crow.

Old Zachariah turned his lank frame over in his bed; Mrs. Magpie grunted thrice, and once more began to snore.

The church chimes died into stillness; the latest cock crowed his last faint, hoarse crow, and sleepily settled himself down again on his perch.

A deeper quiet than before seemed to reign—not even a cricket chirped or frog croaked.

Amidst the peaceful hush of this silent hour, old Zachariah was suddenly startled from his sleep by such a battering at his door as has not made the echoes of the neighborhood resound since the time when iron-handed Roundheads banged at the stubborn door in quest of hated Royalists.

The worthy landlord drowsily awoke, and he pricked up his ears and turned his game eye towards the ruddy face of his better-half, which till now had lain half smothered among the pillows, but now bounced up as sharply as if a shell had exploded in each fiery ear—alarm, rage, dismay in every lineament.

A moment she listened; the very frills of her night-cap standing on end with fright, then with both hands she seized on her husband and shook him to and fro.

"Zachariah—Zachariah—ZACHARIAH! do you hear that?"

The passive Zachariah drowsily kicked out one lanky leg, and sniffed out, as he turned over again:

"Hush! it's the tarnal rats."

"The rats! Are you mad, and is this bedlam? Wake—wake, and listen! There, you hear now? The house is being knocked down about our ears."

Bang—bang—bang! came violently against the door.

A giant's hand seemed to be making a plaything of the knocker.

And an excited voice bawled out:

"Open—open, I say—open, in the king's name. Oh, within—ostlers—landlord—all—open the door!"

"There!" screeched Mrs. Magpie, in a suppressed whisper, "it's the rats, eh? The rats, you old crocodile-headed ass!"

Old Zachariah slipped quietly out of bed, and threw his long legs into his trousers.

Creeping softly to the window, which swung open inward, he noiselessly pulled it back and peered out.

He was a bit "skeared" at what he saw.

A party of officers were in front of the house.

These were battering lustily at the door.

Apart from them, their steel bayonets glittering in the uncertain light, were a party of marines.

Old Zachariah knew very well what this meant. They had been put on the right scent now, and had come to capture Tom.

Very softly he slid the window to, and crept back to bed.

"It's them tarnation fools of officers again," he

said to his better-half, as he slipped gently under the bed-clothes.

"The officers!" gasped the lady, "and you come into bed again, with them trying to knock the house in!"

"Sartin'; let 'em knock, and be cussed to 'em; they'll get tired afore I'm tired of listening, I guess—some."

At a loss what to do, the infuriated dame punched into her husband right and left.

"They'll break the house in—the house in! Do you hear?"

"Sarpints seize yer, woman; ain't the door stouter than a Californy tree? Let 'em knock, I say, and blazes to 'em!"

"Bang—bang—bang! Clatter—clatter—clatter! Crash!"

All the bolts seemed to be flying out of the ponderous door.

Smash went in a portion of the strongly barred window.

It is possible that even then the landlord of the "Yellow Alligator" might have quietly dozed off again, so confident was he in the superior strength of his door, if his excited better half had not seized him by the hair of his head, and literally jerked him out of bed.

"Say, old gal," exclaimed the easy-going Kentuckian, "them roots ain't clenched t'other side, and wool don't grow again at my time of day."

"You beast, you!" squealed his partner. "Go to them—speak to them, or I'll speak to them for you!"

"I guess if I'd had my tarnal will I'd ram that old knocker down their cussed throat, and this long arm and fist in the bargain; if I wouldn't, snakes-hides and sugar!" grunted the old fellow, as he returned to the window. One of the officers was just then performing a vigorous flourish on the knocker; two others were battering it with immense beams.

As Zachariah put his head out, the summons for him to open the door became louder and fiercer from the perspiring officers.

One voice he could detect; it was that of Matthews, prominent among the others.

"Open house!" he bawled. "We are king's officers, come for pirates and robbers. Open, I say, or the door shall be battered in, and the house pulled beam from beam."

"Say, strangers," said a quiet voice above them.

Looking up they saw the nightcapped head of Zachariah.

"Say, strangers, you are kicking up a precious shindy down there among yourselves."

"You rascally hound," cried an officer, "you are giving our prisoner a chance of escape. Come down at once, before we put a bullet through your skull."

"Tell you what, old hoss," Zachariah said, coolly, "if I'm to be made a mark for your tarnal bullets, I'll pull in my old wool again; and as for letting yer prisoner escape, whoever that coon may be, strikes me you're making row enough outside to let any cuss know yer game, and send him out of yer way."

"Come down, I say!" roared another voice; "the house is surrounded by soldiers; no one can escape—open to law and justice."

The head of old Zachariah went in with a jerk, and the inflamed visage of his better-half popped out in its place.

"And if he stirs a step to let you in, the chicken-hearted stick," she shrieked, "I'll break his bony back in half, that's what I'll do! Open the door to you, indeed—a pretty set of ruffians to come banging at a peaceful woman's door at this hour of the night!"

"Come—come, Mother Magpie, you've tried this game before, you know. Open the door, or it will be worse for you in the morning."

"Mother Magpie!" screamed the virago, "call me names, too, and to my face. There, that's for your precious impudence."

Her head went in, her arm came out; something else came out also.

It was not the wash-basin.

Nor were its contents harmless soapsuds.

And so the officer felt, as before he could dodge out of the way, they came down on his chops, caroming, as it were, from his face to those of his comrades.

As they howled with rage, the head of Mrs. Magpie went in, and the window closed with a sharp snap.

"This will never do," exclaimed the sergeant of marines, now coming forward. "idling our time here; give them another challenge, and if that is not answered, my men shall beat in the door with their muskets."

The officer did give one more challenge. Such a one it was—right and left the echoes rolled in a startling clamor.

It brought the scared heads of chamber-maid, ostler, and travelers out of their respective win-

dows, and shook the stoutly-built old habitation from basement to its topmost tile.

Whether this had its desired effect, or that old Zachariah had overheard the determination of the sergeant, there was no longer any delay.

In a half-clothed state he shuffled down the stairs, and after a tedious delay, during which his unwelcome visitors battered impatiently outside, the last bolt was withdrawn.

Two or three officers were pressing heavily against the door, and Zachariah, like the cunning old fox he was, drew it back with a jerk.

As a natural consequence, the said officers tumbled in, and rolled sprawling about his legs.

"Say there," growled mine host, "ain't yer got no manners, bundling in neck and crop like that, cuss yer—yer sarpints."

The pimpled countenance of his better half peered over the balusters as the officers rolled in.

She was only half attired, had a monstrous bed-post under her arm, and looked at the sprawling disturbers as if she would much have liked to single out a head for a drive.

And a tap of that bed-post, lunged with the force of her big, powerful arms would have produced an uncomfortable crash on any skull it happened to hit.

"Now, lads," said the sergeant, briskly, "search the place well while I and my men remain outside."

"Are you all loaded, men?"

A responsive reply came from the rank.

"Then keep your weapons cocked, and bring down dead, or maimed, any man you see attempting to escape from the house."

"You infernal old scamp," cried Matthews, who was one of the tumbled officers, "you shall pay for this."

"Don't ruffle your wool, my 'tarnal lamb," replied Zachariah, quietly.

His more irascible wife bawled over the balusters:

"Hit him, Zacariah. Knock him down if he attempts to come this way."

"Sergeant," Matthews exclaimed, "let your men make that dangerous woman prisoner."

"Make me prisoner!" shrieked she, "let them try it—let them try it, I say!"

She flourished the bed-post as if it had been a toy.

"We don't want to annoy you, my good woman," Jonas said, "We've come for our man, and there's no occasion for you to be put out of the way. You needn't stay in your room when we come to search it."

"Say, stranger," exclaimed Zachariah, holding the flaring candle above his head, "guess I'll come and see yer scotch this critter."

Matthews snatched the light from his hand.

"Take care," he said, and grinding his teeth led the way.

The officers were bent on a search, and a search they made in earnest.

They rummaged room after room, from kitchen to attic.

They scoured the cellars, and even ventured out of the lofts on to the tiles.

They peeped into cupboards and under beds; dragged out musty old furniture, which had not been disturbed for years; tapped ceilings and walls, and sounded floors.

They hunted between the chambermaid's mattresses, and banged her pillows, to see if they contained a huddled form.

The sleepy hostler was dragged from his straw; night tramps and wayfarers were aroused from their drowsy rest.

But no sign of the culprit could they discover.

The only thing they started was a huge Tom cat, which howled and grimaced awfully as it scudded away.

During the whole of their search, the imperturbable Zachariah was at their elbows, stinging them to madness by his goading suggestions and sarcastic sneers.

In one room they found a weather-beaten tar, soundly asleep amid all their din.

He was roughly awakened, and bidden to give an account of himself, which, albeit, in a very sleepy manner, he did to their satisfaction, and was left to his repose.

We need hardly say that the weather-beaten tar was our friend Bob Hauler.

The officers must have felt very hot indeed when they crept into the big desolate room where stood the veritable bed on which the object of their search had been sleeping less than half an hour before.

They found it, as Zachariah had expected, empty, and presenting no appearance of having been tenanted.

Our hero had heard the first of the disturbance, and touching the spring, had gone down to the secret hiding-place, between the floor of that room and the ceiling of the next.

Here he was lying in silence and darkness.

when the hubbub overhead announced that the officers of justice were searching that room.

In his present concealment he was comparatively safe, but there was just a chance of the spring of the moveable bedstead being discovered, and so listening for every sound, he waited with hand on his sword-hilt, ready to spring forth, or stand at bay for liberty or life.

Matthews, who directed the search, evidently had his suspicions about that room, not unreasonably, for in spite of its bareness, it looked a likely place to hide in.

With a knowing look on his ill-bred face, the thief-taker stalked across the room, stamping heavily with his feet.

"It sounds hollow here," he said, stopping in the center of the room and looking cunningly at Zachariah.

The old fellow grinned.

"He ain't hiding in one of them cracks, is he?" he asked, sarcastically.

Matthews scowled.

"He's hiding here somewhere," he exclaimed, fiercely, "and we mean to find him, or we'll pull this place down level with the ground."

Old Zachariah grinned from ear to ear.

"Hearn tell of them sort o' tarnal places; but tell yer what, ole hoss, this here ain't one of 'em. When the lease is out I'll let you know."

"Men," shouted Matthews, beside himself with passion, "I am convinced he is skulking here somewhere. Follow me around the rooms; knock against the walls; we'll soon find out if he's behind them."

"Is that him behind you?" asked Zachariah.

Matthews sprang around, nearly knocking over a confederate.

"Look out!" bawled Zachariah.

Matthews leaped back again.

"Mind he don't get out at the window."

Matthews made a run towards that part of the room.

"Perhaps he's behind those curtains."

Matthews tore the moth-eaten old hangings open.

Nothing was there but an immense cloud of dust.

"Halloo, there he goes!" cried Zachariah.

There was a scuffle under the curtains.

All the officers rushed there at once.

But the disturber was only a monstrous rat.

"You're getting hot," said Old Zack, as they passed by the bedstead.

"Men," yelled Matthews, "this old scoundrel is only laughing at us; follow me."

They followed him in a body around the room, tapping at the walls with the butts of their pistols.

But every where it gave back the same dull sound.

One of these old-fashioned staircase clocks stood in a corner by itself, covered with dust, and looking a likely place for a pirate to hide in.

"Colder—colder—colder," Zachariah said, as Matthews cautiously tapped the case.

"I want the key of this!" Matthews exclaimed.

"Guess you'll want, seeing as how he put it in his pocket before he locked himself inside."

This was not very probable, considering that the door only locked from the outside, and Matthews, with a savage curse, took out a broad-bladed knife, and forced back the lock without further preamble.

The inside was vacant enough.

There hung the long pendulum, quiet enough and crowded with cobwebs.

The two heavy weights were drawn up to the top.

Matthews put his head in.

"Plenty of dust and cobwebs inside—nothing more."

"Hallo! stop him!" bawled Zachariah.

Matthews sprang back in such a hurry that his thick skull came against the iron weights with a concussion that sounded all over the room.

The blow was so sudden that he thought he had been felled by the concealed boy buccaneer.

"Murder! seize him!" he cried.

Old Zachariah's laugh recalled him to his senses.

And with a malicious gleam in his evil eyes he kicked to the door of the clock.

Without deigning the old fellow a word, he walked straight to the big bedstead.

"Darned warm," cried Zachariah.

Matthews rapped against the post.

"Hotter! hotter!" the landlord sang out.

Matthews tried to understand what he meant.

Very cunningly he examined the affair.

"Curious kind of bedstead, that," Zachariah said.

"Yes," Matthews replied.

He had been stooping down to examine the wooden posts, and now he cried, quickly:

"Here, men; two of you stand by the door and

keep an eye on that old thief; the others come. We'll have these boards up."

"Snakes and alligators!" sang out Zachariah; "if it don't get darned hot—some!"

The officers had no doubt, that their leader had stumbled upon a clew to Tom's hiding-place.

They got their pistols ready.

Some of them went rather pale, as Matthews began to rip the boards apart.

They had heard of the prowess of the daring boy hero, and at every sound expected to see him spring, like an angry panther, in the midst of them.

All their pistols were on full cock, and they meant to fire all together when he did show himself.

The old boards were well laid down, and it was some time before one could be lifted from its place.

No sound came from beneath.

Another plank was removed, and Matthews looked in.

"Just as I thought; room enough to hide a dozen."

"Say, ole hoss," Zachariah said, "shouldn't put my head in too far."

To do him justice, the thief-taker was no coward.

Taking no notice of the Kentuckian, he lit a closed lantern, and pistol in hand, thrust his body half way in.

"Captain Tom Drake," he exclaimed, "surrender! I shall fire in each direction, so, you'd better give in."

His voice sounded strangely hollow under the floor.

There was no other sound.

Matthews spoke again.

"I warn you. When I have counted three I shall fire."

No answer.

Matthews counted slowly:

"One—two—three."

A moment's silence.

Then the sharp crack, as he fired his pistol.

All was silent again.

No cry, no movement.

He took another pistol, and fired again, this time in another direction, but with the same result.

When he had discharged a bullet in every direction, he took another loaded one from one of his comrades.

"If I raise a cry," said he, "rip open the boards; you'll find me with the pirate, dead or alive."

He slipped his body under the musty boards, and crawled out of sight. So dense was the darkness that his lantern enabled him only faintly to look about.

The place was dark and close to suffocation.

It seemed to go the whole way under the floor, and he had just room to lie flat and crawl along.

He certainly had courage, to venture there.

To any one concealed in the musty hole, he must have been a visible mark, and the first token of the boy adventurer's presence might have been the passage of a sword through his prostrate body.

Crawling slowly over the heavy joists, he tried, by the light of the lantern, to look for the bleeding form of Captain Tom.

At almost every moment he had to stop, and clear the thick cobwebs from his face, while the thick, mouldy dust arose in blinding clouds every time he raised his arm.

He had been under about five minutes, when the officers kneeling by the open gap were startled by a sudden agonized cry.

It was the voice of Matthews, convulsed and horrible in its shaken tones.

Then the officers sprang back, expecting to see the dreaded boy cruiser leap forth, his hands red with the blood of their comrade.

Even old Zachariah gave a start.

For a moment all stood still, then, remembering their leader's instructions, the officers tore up another of the worm-eaten planks, making an opening wide enough for them to see the struggling feet of their hardy comrade.

Half a dozen stood ready with loaded pistols, while two seized Matthews by the heels, and with a jerk dragged him forth.

He had no deadly pirate in his grasp.

No deed of blood had been committed under those mouldy boards.

The cause of this outcry was explained by the sight of a huge black rat, which had fastened on his cheek, and still clung by its sharp fangs.

"Tarnation devils!" Zachariah cried, with a laugh, "I calkerlate yer make a better rat-catcher nor a trapper of pirates."

With his fingers and thumb he nipped the body of the ferocious animal.

The huge rat gave one writhe, and relinquishing his hold of Matthews' face, lay in Zachariah's grasp, its life squeezed out of its body.

"There, ole hoss," said the landlord, "that's done his business, and next time I want more on 'em caught, I'll send for you, cuss me if I don't."

Matthews wiped the blood from his lacerated cheek.

"We are foiled," he said; "I've been over every inch under there—a cat could not have escaped me."

"Nary rat either, I guess."

"Silence, you old scoundrel! We may have him yet, and then you shall answer for all."

A quiet grin passed over the old fellow's face.

He thrust his tongue significantly in his cheek as Matthews and his party left the room, and when the last had crossed the threshold, hummed, loud enough for them to hear:

"Opossums and snakes, boiled beans and butter. Sartain, I guess, you won't get any supper."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE bedstead was so constructed that on pressing the spring, the lower part, with the bed, sank right through the floor, going beneath the parted floor, on the top of which Matthews had crawled.

As soon as it stopped, our hero slid off, when the bedstead arose to its place, and the ceiling of the lower room, which descended with the bedstead, resumed its proper position, leaving Tom ensconced in a narrow compartment under the wall, behind the bedstead.

A heavy beam was between him and the under floor, so that when Matthews discharged his pistol, the bullets flattened against the massive wood, leaving our hero unharmed.

The means Tom had adopted to go down with security were used by old Zach to fetch him up again when the baffled officers had retired.

"You'll find your man thar," he said, pointing to Bob Hauler's room. "Thar's time for yer to clear out, and that's all. Them varmints is in ambush, or I'm no judge of human dealings; an' they'll come agin for their mate, sartain."

Without waiting for a word from our hero, he hurried from the landing.

Rob Hauler was ready dressed.

He saluted his brave leader warmly and respectfully, and in silence followed him down stairs.

Zachariah was at the door.

He seemed inclined to avoid his young guest, but Tom went straight up to the stanch old fellow, and gripped him by the hand.

"Farewell, Zach," he said, "I shall not forget the service you have rendered me. I owe to you my safety, perhaps my life—thanks. The time may soon come when I shall see you again."

Old Zachariah turned his head away.

A tear was in his eye.

"God bless yer," he cried, as he wrung the boy chieftain's hand. "I shall see yer a king yet among yer fellows—an' it'll cheer this old heart to know yer don't think harshly of Zachariah."

Tom's foot was on the threshold.

He was in the act of stepping forth, when his old friend was pushed sharply aside, and two big, soft arms wound themselves around our hero's graceful form.

He felt himself drawn towards a huge mass of flesh, and as soon as he could look up he found that he was in the embrace of Mother Magpie.

"I know you," she cried. "You desperate, determined, good-looking, blood-thirsty, merciless, noble young man! You wicked fellow, you! I ought to betray you, I ought—you are so bad. But I can't forget the times I've nursed you when you was a boy, in the land far away. There, good-by, you bad boy."

She gave our hero a regular hug, and bestowing two hearty smacks upon his round cheeks, in the way of kisses, released him from her fat arms and pushed him from the door.

In spite of his feelings, Tom could not help smiling.

He waved his hand gallantly, and bade the pair adieu—but not until he was out of sight was the door closed upon him by old Zachariah and Mother Magpie.

The human blood-hunters seemed off the scent.

Tom and his faithful attendant walked on in silence, and unmolested.

Each was busy with his own thoughts—our hero thinking of the tragic fate of the thief-taker, and Bob Hauler mentally wishing himself and his beloved leader safe on board ship, and out on the sea away from the dangers of shore.

He ventured to hope that that was in the programme now.

"I shall not yet return," was the chieftain's reply. "When we reach Smuggler's Point, make the best of your way on board, and say I shall follow you in a few hours. Tell Ben Barnacle

to be on the look out for shore, and to have all ready for instant departure; meantime I shall sleep down here for the remainder of the night," adding to himself, "to-morrow I must see Lady Arbuthnot."

He wished to see her respecting Minnie, whom she had visited at Lady Castlemaine's.

Her ladyship was not at home the first time he called, and it was getting dark when he again presented himself.

Knowing that old Lord Henry, her ladyship's husband, was of an awfully jealous temperament, it struck him that he might have seen him approaching, and have denied him admittance, a trick that he had been known to serve other gallants, who he feared might make too free with his lovely wife.

Our hero resolved to enter by the side gate, and make his way through the shrubbery.

The old lodge-keeper, who saw him go, smiled quaintly.

Not fifteen minutes earlier, the antique gate had creaked on its hinges to admit another visitor.

The lodge-keeper had been in the family a generation; his master was young when he himself was a boy, and he had never liked his taking to himself Lady Arbuthnot for a wife.

She was too young and beautiful to suit the decrepit old servitor's taste.

Besides, her time was given to ceaseless balls and parties, in place of being spent with her venerable husband in the old rookery known as Castle Rock.

So he smiled knowingly when he saw Tom go in.

He who had entered before was one whom Tom might have had reason to avoid had he known of his presence there.

The Hon. Archibald Gaston.

He had come ashore the previous day from Admiral Ellis's ship, and had stole into the shrubbery in the hope of meeting Lady Arbuthnot, whose ravishing beauty, as she danced with him the previous night, had excited his hot passions and made him dare all in the hope of gaining her smiles.

Very like a thief in the fold did he look as he crept along the concealment of the shrubbery to her ladyship's favorite bower—a charming, secluded spot, begirt with rarest flowers, and surrounded by cool fountains, making the air soft and fresh.

He was uncertain whether Lady Arbuthnot might be out of doors, and his heart beat with fervid excitement when he came upon a full view of the fairy-like bower, and beheld the beautiful mistress of Castle Rock.

She was standing within the shadow of a marble temple, around whose slender columns roses and eglantines climbed.

She was attired in a robe of purest white; its soft folds falling ravishingly about her voluptuous form.

Her beautiful arms were bare, and a gossamer-like scarf was drawn across her shoulders, whose dazzling loveliness were only half hidden by the transparent drapery.

Gaston was transfixed for the moment by this vision of her superb loveliness.

She looked so purely beautiful, that if his brain had not been fired by his blind passion, he must have retreated, ashamed of his vile intents.

But her charms only gave new fervor to his wild hopes, and advancing softly, he placed himself in her sight.

Lady Arbuthnot started when her glance fell upon him.

He seemed to her like some noisome thing, obtruded suddenly from amidst her favorite flowers.

She inclined her head coldly, as he bowed almost to the ground.

This did not content him.

He advanced to the marble pillars, and stood between her and her way of egress.

The picturesque little temple could be seen some distance off, and our hero had just caught sight of Lady Arbuthnot, standing like a priestess beneath its fane, when Lieutenant Gaston came upon the scene.

He did not at first recognize Gaston, and, not knowing that he might not be intruding on some assignation, held aloof.

"Some favored cavalier, bidden to meet his mistress in that bower of love," he mused; "yet it seems *strange* she should yield; had any man hinted this to me I should have felt inclined to drive the lie at the top of my sword down his throat. The old—old story, though—youth and age—a withered imbecile plucks some such blooming flower for his own, and thinks to revel in its sweetness. Vain delusion—oh! they meet—not a very warm greeting for a lover that. Perhaps I do the lady wrong—I'll watch."

He did watch, and was considerably interested at what he saw.

The old—old story—a dishonorable man madly

infatuated with an old friend's wife; his fierce and shameless confession of his wayward love, but in this case met with scorn.

Driven mad by her contempt, he turns from a dishonorable suitor to a desperate libertine. She screams, and Tom leaps out, confronting him.

Tom's sword is ready to cut him down, but he turns from him; he recognizes our hero, and, with a laugh, cries:

"You here, pirate? By heavens, run as hard as you like, and I'll have you brought back—to swing at the gallows," and he leaves our hero alone with the lady whose help he seeks.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A PRISONER AT LAST.

We left our hero with the lady whom he had rescued from Gaston's coarse insults—alone in her charming bower.

She looked gratefully into our hero's face, thanking him as warmly with those glorious eyes of hers as if she had spoken with her tongue.

Silence is very—is dangerously eloquent at times. This was one of those times, and he thrilled to his heart's core when she placed both hands in his and said, simply:

"My preserver—and we meet again. You dare much, Tom Drake."

"I would dare more for you," he answered.

"But remember the one implacable foe whom you just frustrated has recognized you, and will put his dastardly threat into execution."

"I thought I had disguised myself against all save the eyes of love, but the eyes of hate are as keen," he replied in a low tone, a little saddened by the memory of Minnie's letter.

"You must escape."

"You would not have me taken, then—pirate as they, in this country, have branded me."

"You are daring and brave, and bravery always commands a woman's"—love, she would have said, but substituted "esteem. Flee, I entreat you. Accept my thanks, ay, my admiration, for saving me from that ruffian. We must say farewell forever. I do not forget when first we met. Alas! I wish it had been the last time; still I may see you when there is less risk, less at stake than now—your life. I had forgotten." Her ladyship gave a little start as she added this.

"Forgotten what—to whom you were speaking?"

"No—no; I have a letter."

"A letter—not from her dear hand?"

"Yes. The letter is in my desk; but tarry not now for it. Your life, remember—"

"Now—now, at any cost, at any risk—even my worthless life—but now."

"Stay here then, I will be fleet. Do not stir, I conjure you; but bear in mind, rash boy, that if you are captured your fate will be death."

She was gone while the trembling words still quivered in her ears. It was growing darker, everything around him was strangely silent; a silence that charmed him into forgetfulness, until a slight rustling among the leaves, the rustling of a silken skirt, and Lady Arbuthnot stood before him.

"Escape now," she said, stifling a quiver of anguish, "and read this when safe from here."

But without an answer, he tore open the coveted letter. She was surprised at the start he gave, and the change in his demeanor.

His face was deathly pale, while its mute agony was that of one who felt intense suffering without possessing the means to express it.

"Are you a friend of mine?" he said, hoarsely. "Are you, too, playing me false—had you this from her own hands?"

"I had, indeed, with the request that I should convey it to your own hands. Her own lips kissed the letter as she gave it to me."

"Kisses, and on such perfidy as this! False to me; false to our vows. Oh, Minnie, Minnie! whom I thought more immaculate than the lily. God of Heaven, if this be true, I care no more for life. I have lived my day. Death—death is my only surcease from such sorrow as this. Thus—thus I rend its cursed characters into shreds, that it may not be a silent witness to such a heart's faithlessness."

He tore the letter piecemeal and cast it to the winds.

Lady Arbuthnot's face blanched white as marble and became quite as rigid, and she clutched him by the wrist.

"Hush!" she said, and listened to the tramp of armed men; "they come—save yourself."

"Let them come. Ho, there! ye who seek Captain Tom Drake, he is here!"

They came. Bayonets borne in the hands of stalwart men, glittered in the dusk, and he saw them slowly lowered as the deadly muskets were leveled at his heart.

"Captain Tom Drake!" cried the officer in com-

mand, "resistance is useless. Surrender, or we fire!"

Our hero stood like a statue; he made no offer of resistance. His lips curled in almost cruel indifference, and calmly folded his arms as the soldiers surrounded him. Lady Arbuthnot had fainted, and did not hear the fading tramp of the men as the officer marched them away with gallant Tom a prisoner at last.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PASSAGE TO LIBERTY.

SEATED on a stone bench in a close, unwholesome dungeon, heavily ironed from his wrists to his ankles, our hero had leisure to reflect upon the position to which his own rashness had brought him.

Had he escaped before the soldiers came upon him, he might now be on his own deck again, a monarch, defying the power of the enemy to take him.

Now what was he?

A doomed captive!

Immured within those four bare walls, from which he would only be taken to be led to a bitter trial and ignominious death.

There was no uncertainty of the fate awaiting him.

As a pirate he would be tried, and as a pirate sentenced and executed.

Outside the harbor, his noble ship, with its gallant crew, awaited his return, and here he had, by his tame surrender of himself, placed his life in the hands of those who had gone so far as to send ships of war to effect his capture.

And this he had done because of one deception. Minnie had proved false to him.

He had her miniature still resting against his breast—resting there with the soft tresses of her golden hair wound about it.

It had never been taken from his bosom since she gave it to him on that still summer's evening when they had plighted their troths, except when he had taken it forth to shower caresses on her beautiful, innocent face.

Now it rested over his breast like a leaden weight—crushing his heart's fervent beat with the oppressive sense of her treachery.

The shadows had deepened in his lonely cell, when he was aroused by hearing the harsh creaking of the key in the ponderous lock.

He heard the rusty bolts pulled back, then the door swung heavily on its hinges, and the glare of a lantern shone upon his face.

Two figures stood in the doorway—a lady and the jailer who was ushering her in.

One glance was sufficient to assure him that his visitor was Lady Arbuthnot.

The jailer closed the door when they had entered, and turned the light more fully upon the prisoner.

"There he be, my lady," he said, with a coarse grin on his low looking visage; "trapped at last. We've been a long time a-trying to nab him, but we've got him now, and will keep him safe enough, I warrant, like the pretty bird he is."

Our hero's face flushed, and his kindling eyes flashed angrily as the jailer spoke, but her ladyship, stepping in advance of the man, raised her gloved hand for him to pay no heed to the fellow's words.

She was very pale, and looked sorrowfully at the heavy irons on our hero's wrists.

Tom understood what was passing in her mind.

He smiled bitterly, and said:

"They have chained me down, as you see. I am like a caged beast. I wonder whether I shall be made a show of before I am let out?"

Lady Arbuthnot's eyes filled with tears.

"Rash boy!" she exclaimed; "what have you done? Do you know the merciless nature of those to whom you have surrendered yourself?"

"Oh, yes," replied our hero, carelessly; "they will cage me here till they take me out to try me as a pirate. They will sentence me for being what they made me, and, after that, a very brief affair—just one sharp volley, and they'll have no more to fear from Captain Tom Drake."

Lady Arbuthnot wrung her hands as if in pain.

"And can you so calmly regard your certain fate?" she cried. "Foolish, hot-headed boy, you have indeed taken a fatal step. All your enemies could not have been so treacherous to you as you have been to yourself in this fatal step."

Lady Arbuthnot sighed as the graceful form of the boy hero stood erect before her.

It seemed so cruel that he should be imprisoned there, caged like a snared beast of prey.

So hard that he should be led forth to die in the very freshness of his youthful strength and beauty.

He was so young, too, a stripling in years; such a youth in looks, so princely noble in spite

of his fierce, heroic deeds—deeds that had amazed the world, but for which he must surely die, unless he baffled the vigilance of his foes and escaped their vengeance.

"Oh, why were you so hasty?" she cried. "There is no hope of mercy; the news has gone forth that you are taken, and no influence will avail to obtain clemency."

"And if it would," Tom exclaimed, "it should not be granted for me. I disdain to accept my country's clemency—its pardon for crimes of which I am guiltless. I have raised my hand against their laws, and for what I have done I will suffer, but never ask mercy. Besides," his head dropped mournfully, "if Minnie had not betrayed me, I should not have been here, and when I gave my life and liberty, it was because both had lost their charms in the bitterness of her falsity."

He sat himself moodily down as he continued: "We were sworn to each other; if I had not seen the proof in her own words I should never have believed it. I could not think she would ever deceive me."

"Nor could I. Think well—are you sure you have not been deceived by others, and not by your bride?"

Tom leaped to his feet.

"If it were so, and I could but get my fingers to the throat of any one that wronged her and betrayed me, I would wring his heart's gall into his venomous throat, and crush his life out like an adder's! But no—no; it is she only who has deceived me."

"She may have been coerced—forced to write this note against her consent."

"And if she were so weak she would be quite unworthy to be mine. No, when I rescued her in the old church, whither she had been dragged an unwilling bride, she was a helpless victim—led like a lamb to the slaughter, menaced with cruel force; but, even then, her lips refused to utter the unwilling lie that gave her to another, and when at my sword's red tip I kept her foes at bay, and drew her to my breast, her looks of love and joy belied their infamy, and told me she was mine. I was mad to leave her after that. I might have known a woman's constancy could not endure in absence."

"You wrong her, sir. I am convinced she is as true as steel, and loves you with the steadfastness of a woman's love. This letter—I gathered the pieces and joined them—had she written it, must have been blotted with tears—faltering with the trembling of a nervous hand; but here the letters are written with the greatest care—the blistering words in which she renounces you, and bids you never seek her again, stand out bold in their infamy—like the *lie* they are. Look at the missive—read it again, and not with half-blind jealousy and passion, and tell me if these are such words as her gentle soul would prompt."

Our hero drew back.

"I will not look on the hateful lines again; another prompted the accursed words, but she alone penned them."

"I will not believe it. When I saw her at Lady Castlemaine's, her eyes were filled with tears as she spoke your name; her words were gentle and full of love, and when she gave me the letter, she took your love token from her bosom, and kissed it before she tenderly replaced it. This was not faithlessness. I tell you her words were all innocence, truth, and constancy. If there was a serpent, it was her lady protector, who met me on the threshold, smiling in triumph when she saw me conceal the letter."

Our hero's features were swarthy with excitement.

He gazed as one in a dream in his fair visitor's countenance.

"What would you have me believe?" he asked, wildly.

"That she as well as you has been deceived—that this letter was written before I came—that some one stole to her desk, took out the note she had written, and replaced it with these forged lines written to convince you she was false; and, who knows, that same hand may have intercepted your letters to her, and given her others, so cunningly worded, as to wring her gentle heart with the pangs of your unfaithfulness."

Our hero reeled.

A dim idea of the possibility of what she suggested was creeping with awful import on his misgiving mind.

"Give me the letter—let me look at it again," he cried, stepping towards her.

She held it out to him.

He took the missive in his fettered hands.

Line by line, and word by word, he followed it, and as he read, he seemed comparing the characters with those she had before written to him.

Before he had half read it through, a cry of fierce anguish escaped him, and he crushed the letter in his palm.

"It is too true," he cried, fiercely. "I have been betrayed and snared. It is a forgery."

"And serve you right," the jailer exclaimed, fiercely. "Such as you deserve all you gets."

The sudden spring Tom made at the fellow sent him cowering back in fear to the ironed door.

Lady Arbuthnot placed herself between them. "Calm yourself," she said; "this base hireling is unworthy of your notice. Besides you have need of all your energies to meet this fatal calamity."

"Be calm! God of Heaven! with this foul treachery selling me to death. Oh, what a mad fool have I been, to be hoodwinked and cajoled like this. Deceived by so base a lie—caged here to meet my doom, while she, stricken bird, believes me false! Oh, for an hour of liberty to battle for my life! God! that I had twenty of my faithful followers to batter down these walls, and fight the myriads of hired foes! One brief day's life, and I would leave a bloody mark behind me that should wipe from earth those whose accursed treachery has come between me and my bride, to sunder us forever."

The excited boy strode fiercely across his cell, his fetters clanking at each step.

"Give me the air of freedom," cries Tom. "Give me life—life! I shall go mad! A word to my stanch crew to bring them here. I should not despair if only twenty came. But to be here alone—alone! Let me forth, I say! Set my limbs free of these manacles, or I shall crush your brains out in my rage!"

The jailer retreated in alarm. Such a look of mad fury was in the daring hero's inflamed face, the veins of his forehead were purple and swollen, and his chest expanded in its lion-like strength, as he tried to snap his chains.

Lady Arbuthnot laid her hand softly on his heated brow. "Listen to me," she said. "You have brought yourself here. It is useless beating your wings against your cage. You have no faith in a woman's constancy; try and have a little in a woman's wit to help you out of your difficulty."

Our hero looked wildly in her face, but said nothing. Lady Arbuthnot continued: "The inexplicable hand of fate is visible in every incident of your strange career. You had no sooner been led from my garden a prisoner, than I received intelligence that Lady Castlemaine had arrived here with her young charge, Minnie."

"Minnie here, and I a prisoner?" "She is brought here that she may be thrown into Lord Kilerew's society, her future husband, if Lady Castlemaine's plans succeed. She will meet him to-night at the masquerade, to which I have tickets of invitation."

"To-night! By Heavens, I would give my life for one hour at that masquerade—one hour with my sword in my grasp!" "It shall be so. You shall see your bride to-night."

Our hero looked wistfully at her, then his glance fell on his fetters.

"To-night! How? All you tell me seems like a dream; but have you the wand of an enchantress to wave, that these walls may open and reveal my path to liberty?"

"Ah," put in the jailer, "it'll want a fairy's wand to set *him* at liberty again."

"My man"—Lady Arbuthnot's voice was strangely cold and calm—"I have resolved, at all hazards, he shall be set at liberty, and I have taken every precaution to insure his freedom."

"You'll have to get the right side of some high person, for it ain't to be supposed they'll let him off if they can help it, now that they have coted him."

Her ladyship stepped nearer to the man.

Her face was frigid and pale, her tones as deep and calm as before.

"I am aware that you have charge of this prisoner, and will have to answer for his safety; therefore, in the event of his escape, you will need a handsome reward to repay you for any punishment you may receive."

The jailer drew back.

"Taint no use, my lady, you don't bribe me at no price."

"It is unnecessary."

The words were spoken in a strangely thrilling tone.

Her ladyship's gloved hand had gone to the pocket of her richly embroidered dress.

Now she drew forth her lace-edged handkerchief.

She was standing face to face with the jailer, at less than arm's distance.

When she spoke these few significant words, the fellow, with an instinct of the subtle, sinister danger, was retreating to the door.

Lady Arbuthnot's fascinating eyes were looking into his.

They warned him of his danger, and a sudden cry came to his lips.

Too late!

The small gloved hand was raised swiftly to his mouth; the elegant embroidered handkerchief was pressed to his nostrils—a subtle odor arose from the folds of lace, and the jailer, with ghastly face and set, staring eyes, sank heavily against the door.

Still the fatal cambric and lace was held firmly to his nostrils—held till the ghastliness of his visage settled to a look like death; his arms hung powerless to his side, and the large keys, dropping from his nerveless hand to the floor of the cell, fell with a rattle and ring that seemed to strike to the very soul of our hero, as he watched this brief and sudden tragedy.

Pale as the man himself, Lady Arbuthnot drew her hand away.

The jailer sank heavily to the stones, and lay as if dead.

"Now," Lady Arbuthnot cried in a hoarse whisper—"quick, before it is too late."

She stooped over the prostrate man, her nimble fingers searched his pockets, and plucked forth a small bunch of keys.

"Your fetters, quick," she cried.

Tom held forth his hands.

The key turned in the lock, and the iron fell heavily to his feet.

All this had passed so quickly that our hero could scarcely comprehend what was going forward, before he found himself released from his fetters, and standing free of limb, with the keys that would unlock his way to liberty lying within his grasp.

In the excitement of the moment, he drew Lady Arbuthnot toward him, and fervently kissed her.

The beautiful woman blushed, and gently released herself.

"We must not delay," she said; "discovery will be fatal."

She drew a folded parcel from beneath her skirt.

Their position was too critical for her to affect any false delicacy, but there was a deep tinge on her beautiful cheeks, as she turned toward Tom.

"I have come prepared!" she exclaimed. "Put on this dress, and let us go forth."

The dress was that of a lady, and our hero instinctively drew back.

Her ladyship understood him.

He did not want people to say that he ran away in woman's clothes.

She spoke quickly.

"You will bring me in danger if you hesitate. Consider—what would my husband—the authorities say, if they discovered what I have done for you?"

Tom hesitated no longer.

In a few seconds he was arrayed in the costume of a lady of fashion.

Nothing was wanting in the disguise; even the head-dress was perfect.

He looked rather a tall young lady, it must be confessed, but a touch of rouge put a more effeminate bloom on his cheeks, and made him fit to pass muster.

"Now," his fair deliverer said, "I need not caution you to be calm, whatever happens."

Tom smiled in reply.

"This man, here," he said, "is he—"

"Not dead—he will be insensible for an hour, that is all."

"Enough!" Tom said, and they went forth.

They locked the door, and bolted it.

The keys our hero put in his pocket.

They were heavy, and might make a serviceable weapon if needed.

All was silent in the stone corridor.

They descended the stairs, and arrived unchallenged at the outer gate.

A jailer and the porter were there.

They rose respectfully, and opened the portal. Lady Arbuthnot drew forth her purse.

"Something for yourself and comrade," she said, as she gave them a couple of guineas each.

Captain Tom passed out.

The gate was held open a second or so; then it closed as they entered the carriage which awaited by the door.

"Didn't know as two on 'em comed in," said the porter, as he put the shining coins into his waistcoat pocket.

"I only seed one," replied his companion; "suppose t'other comed arter."

"Likely; 'spose you ain't going to share with the others, eh?"

"Not if I knows it. Keeps all I get to myself."

Meanwhile our hero and his lady liberator had entered the coach.

Lady Arbuthnot, anxious to see him safely seated, would have made him enter first; but, with his natural gallantry, the brave boy insisted upon handing her inside.

As soon as he had taken his place beside her the coach rolled away.

Before it had proceeded far, it stopped in front of a deserted looking house.

The footman came to the carriage door, and respectfully touched his hat.

"Go with this man," her ladyship hastily whispered; "he is my confidential servant; he will procure you costumes. Farewell for the present. We shall meet at the masquerade."

Tom squeezed the fair hand held out to him.

"Stay," her ladyship said. "If you wish to communicate with me, you can intrust your commands to my messenger."

"A thousand grateful thanks," our hero exclaimed, kissing her ladyship's hand; "and now farewell for the hour."

"Farewell, rash boy; and for the future think better of woman's steadfastness, where the object of her love is *worthy* of her devotion."

It struck Tom that her ladyship's voice quivered strangely as she spoke these words.

Had it not been too dark he would have seen that her ladyship's eyes were filled with tears.

The truth must have been plain to him had he stopped to inquire.

Hers was no ordinary interest in his welfare.

She loved him with a deeper fervency than she could give her mistrustful dotard of a husband—loved him devotedly, and, as yet, purely.

Whether that love would be tarnished by passion's indiscreet warmth, remained to be determined by the incidents of the future.

Lady Arbuthnot drove off, and the footman led the way around to the back of the house.

He admitted our hero and himself by a side door.

The interior was dark and silent, but the footman seemed to know every inch of the way.

He conducted our hero to a commodious apartment, and lighted some candles, which were placed on the table.

Our hero took a good look at his new adherent.

He was a quick-witted looking fellow, of about thirty.

At first sight, perhaps, he looked younger, but there were deep-set lines about his face, and a firm contraction of the muscles about the mouth, which showed he had served some apprenticeship in the world's ways.

He gathered up the feminine attire which Tom hastily threw off, and then said, respectfully:

"I am to take your orders, sir, if you please."

"You know me?" Tom asked, steadfastly eying the man.

"I do, sir; my lady——"

"Enough! Can you find your way to the coast?"

"I know every step from here, sir."

"Good! You will find by the beach a fisherman's hut, supposed to be——"

"Bill, the Smuggler's; I know the place, sir."

"Go there. When the door is opened, say merely: '*Three Green Lights*,' and return. I want my crew ashore; that will bring them. And now about our costumes."

"How many, sir?"

"Thirty, and my own."

"Her ladyship has one prepared for you, sir."

"What character?"

"A Greek corsair."

"Excellent! I think the character will suit me to-night. And my men's costumes—they must not be suspiciously disguised—no. Ah, I have it!"

He penciled a few words on a slip of paper, and handed it to the servitor.

The man bowed.

"You will please stay here till I come back," he said; "no one will disturb you; the house is tenantless, and belongs to my lady; I will execute your commission, and bring your costume."

"How shall I know whether to admit you?"

"I shall not enter by the door, nor in the same garb that I now wear."

Bowing again, he went out by the door, and our hero was alone.

What excited emotions were swelling within his breast!

An hour since a manacled captive in a strong prison cell.

Now he was free.

Free to dare his foes to their worst—free to carry out any audacious venture, and strike one blow at his foes before he embarked on board his gallant vessel.

How he longed for the coming hour!

Impatiently he strode up and down the barely-furnished room.

Lady Arbuthnot had evidently made up her mind that he would be able to escape, for wine had been placed on the table for his refreshment, and he thanked her thoughtful care as he drank deeply of the generous fluid.

Thinking of his unexpected escape—of the lady who had so daringly delivered him—of Minnie, and of their coming meeting—kept his mind pretty well occupied till a footstep outside warned him that Lady Arbuthnot's messenger had returned.

He entered immediately after.

He was no longer dressed in footman's garb, but in an attire that gave him a distinguished appearance, and convinced Tom that his position was greater in life than he had pretended.

He bowed as usual.

"Her ladyship has sent by me this costume and this weapon," he said, unrolling a rather bulky parcel. "This letter is from her. Your message has been conveyed to your ship. Three white lights answered the signal."

Our hero opened the note and read:

"DARING BOY:—The costume I have chosen, I think, will be most congenial to your wishes; the sword is a trusty one, and not a toy; the pistols are loaded."

"I hear that you have ordered your men ashore."

"Let me entreat caution in whatever plans you have formed."

"The garden will be thronged with naval and military officers, and an alarm given must result in your capture."

"A word more of news."

"Your Minnie will be in the costume of a vestal virgin. Lord Kilcrew will appear as an Indian chief. Gaston takes the part of a freebooter. Admiral Ellis will be there in the wig of a lord chancellor."

"All this I have discovered from the costumers."

"Adieu! Be on your guard!"

"CLARE."

"The news is welcome," Tom exclaimed, filling himself another goblet of wine. "Ha! that puts some fire in my creeping blood. By the Heavens! my blood shall not run sluggish to-night. Now, friend, the costume; first let me try this blade, I may have need of it."

He bent the blade nearly double, and as it flew back with a swift spring, he laughed lightly, and returned it to the richly ornamented scabbard.

"The blade will do; the pistols are well primed. Commend me to the lady's thoughtful care. Now for the dress. Hurrah for the masquerade!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN UNREAL MASQUERADE.

THE night was yet young when our hero sallied forth to the scene of the masquerade. His corsair suit was a matchless fit, and was well set off by his graceful form and bearing.

Lady Arbuthnot had displayed exceeding taste and judgment in the selection of such a dress.

Nothing could be more picturesque and daring than its effect.

The material of which it was composed was of the choicest texture and color, and from the elegance of its golden embroidery, it must have been the handiwork of some of those Eastern ladies, who, shut up within their luxurious chambers, amuse those hours of loneliness, while awaiting the coming of their lord, by fashioning and adorning raiments of the richest workmanship.

Captain Tom gave no thought to the fair fingers that might have braided his gay costume—nor to the lonely state of so many beauteous women, condemned to be the slaves of one husband.

He was thinking of the events that night might bring forth, if he should burst like a thunderbolt upon the gay revelers, declaring his name and character.

A long blue cloak shrouded his slim figure, partially hiding his masquerade attire, as he stepped into the coach his lady deliverer had placed at his disposal; but on arriving at the scene of the revels, he threw aside his mantle, and appeared in his gorgeous costume.

The masquerade was given by the young and fashionable Countess St. Albans, whose magnificent mansion and splendid grounds were one brilliant array of light and color when our hero arrived.

As it was one of the conditions of the masquerade that the names of the guests should not be known until the hour of the banquet, when, at a signal from their hostess, all should unmask—our hero had only to present his card of invitation, and was then ushered into the splendid reception-room.

A great many of the guests were there, all, of course, masked, and each in some costume the beauty and effect of which tried to outvie all others.

The young and lovely countess was there.

She gave Tom a curious glance when her eyes rested on his graceful form, and seemed striving

to penetrate his mask, to discover who so youthful and handsome a stranger could be.

The countess was unknown to our hero, but he could see she was a mask of high rank, and bowing gallantly as he passed her, he joined the throng hurrying to the fairy-like gardens.

Out in the charming grounds the scene was one bright festival.

Weird-like music floated from every grove, and myriads of colored lamps of chaste construction showed their light upon the brilliant company.

Tom smiled as he thought what a tumult amongst them the mere mention of his presence would create.

What a scene there would be when he unmasked!

It made his hot blood thrill in his veins with an ecstasy of delight.

He had come there on an adventurous mission—come to seek his lady-love, and learn from her own lips the truth or falsity of her broken vows.

Come with a sword by his side, and a trusty crew at his back, to carry his dear prize off from the midst of the armed revelers, should her love remain unchanged.

There was something highly congenial to the roving boy's daring mind in this romantic way of coming for his bride.

Something of the adventurous spirit of the old buccaneers—the old corsairs, who were wont to descend upon a coast, and carry off their maidens amidst sword and flame.

His joyous escape from captivity, too, helped to inspire him with wild audacity, and as he strode amongst the gay throng, his step was elastic, and his bearing full of graceful ease and conscious, dauntless power.

He passed among people whom he recognized; an instinct of detecting other people's disguises was one of the traits for which he was remarkable; but, as yet, he had seen neither Gaston, Admiral Ellis, or Lord Kilcrew.

Among a group of young nobles he recognized his former acquaintances, Lords Claremont, Moreton, Walpole and Vane.

His adversary in the duel he had fought in the bluff old commodore's grounds—the handsome, gentlemanly Claremont, was, as ever, courteous and at ease; Walpole, carelessly merry.

Moreton seemed more touchy and quarrelsome; the fact was, he had been jilted where he imagined he had made a conquest, and was very troublesome in consequence.

Little Lord Augustus Vane was the *beau ideal* of perfection.

His costume was resplendently faultless, and he looked at least an inch higher in his own opinion.

It was a freak of our hero's wayward nature that a very little occasion sufficed to make him put himself in harm's way, and he no sooner saw little Lord Augustus Vane decked out like a pop-injay, than with the old love of mischief beaming from his bright brown eyes, he stalked into the midst of the young nobles, pressing so close to Vane that the little lordling was forced to step back to avoid having his toes trodden upon.

"My dear Lord Vane," Tom said, bringing his gloved hand heavily on the young fop's satin doublet, "I am glad to see that your costumer and valet have done for you that which nature forgot to do—given grace and elegance to your lordship's figure; your dress is superb; I congratulate you!"

Lord Vane stepped back.

"Aw—fact—aw—is this an—aw—insult?" he cried, tapping the hilt of his sword.

Tom laughed heartily.

"Oh, not at all; no—no, my lord. I am pleased to see so young a fledgling turned out so much like a modern Apollo."

"Sir," the young lord exclaimed, angrily, "this is—aw—beyond—aw—bearing! If you—aw—desire a quarrel—aw——"

"Save your anger, my lord; I will not trouble you to flesh your weapon; it were a pity to see so pretty a toy soiled with the nasty stain of blood—what say you, my lords?"

"That your interference with our friend is cursed impertinence," cried Lord Moreton. "I don't know you, sir, but if you are seeking a change from the peaceful programme of this night's amusement, you can take your choice of us."

The daring boy hero's eyes brightened.

He was in the mood to pick a quarrel with any one, for the mere fun of the thing.

A bout of fencing, he thought, would be a good thing to get his hand in for the more serious business of the evening.

So tapping his sword lightly, he said:

"You are right, my lord; the amusement here is slow. A little blood-letting will be an agreeable diversion; so, if it suits your purpose, I will take your challenge."

"Return with me then—this way," Lord More-

ton cried, furiously passionate in a moment, "unless you would wish all gaping eyes to witness our brawl."

"Gentlemen," interposed Claremont, "pray stay this foolish quarrel. On such a night as this even language has a little license."

"But an insult is not to be brooked," Moreton cried. "Come, sir, follow me."

He led the way to a retired cluster of shrubs, and Tom, lightly humming a Greek corsair song, followed him.

The young nobles accompanied them.

Lord Claremont, stalking gravely in the rear, watched anxiously every movement of our hero's graceful figure.

He was trying to recollect where he had before encountered that well-knit frame, with its conscious arrogance of careless strength.

Lord Moreton laid his light cloak on the green-sward, and drew his rapier.

"I presume we need not unmask."

"Unless the physician unmask us," Tom replied, drawing his heavier blade.

The swords crossed.

Moreton, impetuous and skillful, attempted to make short work of his antagonist; but our hero, throwing himself into a careless attitude of defense, quietly baffled his adversary's rapid attack.

"My lord, you thrust wildly," he said, presently; "you have twice been open to my stroke."

"Strike, then," Lord Moreton cried, watching keenly for an opening.

The slur upon his swordsmanship stung him more keenly than if he had been stung by his opponent's weapon.

Standing easily upon the defensive, Tom gave the excited nobleman his fancied opportunity for a thrust.

It was delivered well; but almost before he had lunged at our hero's breast, a hand of iron seemed to twist his wrist, and his sword spun from his grasp, and lay at Tom's feet.

"My lord, I have disarmed you," he said. "Pick up your sword, and let us not be worse friends."

He sheathed his sword.

"Spoken like a gentleman," Walpole exclaimed. "Come, Moreton, shake hands with your opponent, and let us be glad that no blood is shed."

But Moreton, stung by his defeat, turned away with a mortified air.

A strain of such ravishing music at that moment stole upon their ears, that Walpole, picking up his mortified friend's weapon, exclaimed:

"Fie, gentlemen, we insult the witchery of this scene. Come, let us have no more ill blood, join hands, and think no more of this passage of ill humor."

He turned to Tom.

"You will drink wine with us? see, a page approaches with the juicy drink."

"Not now, gentlemen; we will meet again at the banquet; till then I drink with none."

He waved his hand, and forcing his way through the shrubbery, was gone.

The young noblemen looked at each other.

Then Lord Walpole broke out:

"Now who the devil can he be?"

"Aw, that's a puzzler," Lord Vane observed; "he fences like—aw—the deuce! He must have studied that trick of disarming."

"I never saw but one man fence like that," Claremont remarked, thoughtfully; "only one man with that wrist of steel, and quick ease with his rapier hilt—"

"And he?"

"Was my opponent once—Captain Tom Drake."

"I'll unmask him at the supper," Moreton said, savagely.

"Better not, he may have the face of a demon under his mask."

The young nobles laughed at their companion's mortified vexation, and having drank of the generous wine, strolled to another part of the illuminated gardens.

Meanwhile our hero sauntered on his way.

The little passage of arms had stirred his blood, and his heart was all aglow as he proceeded in the direction whence came the sounds of soft, melodious music.

An instinct told him that Minnie Atherton was most likely to be in some secluded nook apart from the revelers, and near to the concealed musicians.

The path led him to a spot of such extraordinary quietude and beauty, that he sat down entranced, and listened to the splashing of the cool fountains over the marble at his feet.

He wondered so few of the guests were drawn to such a retired nook of loveliness, and while he sat musing and wondering, he became conscious of the fact that he was not alone.

They were two female masks who came towards him.

One, in the character of Diana, he knew at the first glance.

It was Lady Arbuthnot.

The other, a vestal virgin.

How his heart bounded as he recognized his boyhood's dream—Minnie Atherton!

He could not mistake her.

There was the same beauteous form of grace; the same white rounded arms—how often he had wished to have them entwined about his neck, as they had been softly entwined in days gone by.

There were the same sweet blue eyes, slightly mournful now, and timid, but gentle and tender as ever; the same ripe chiseled lips he had so sacredly kissed; the same abundance of golden hair—one tress of which yet lay in its purity and grace against his heart.

It was very hard to restrain himself from leaping towards her, and folding her to his breast.

But the time was not yet come, and so he remained where he had stood on rising, while Lady Arbuthnot advanced with her girlish charge.

She surveyed our hero's appearance with admiration.

He certainly did justice to her care.

He looked incomparably noble, as he drew his elegant form erect; his costly costume according so well with his careless, defiant bearing.

Lady Arbuthnot, smiling pleasantly on Minnie, now spoke:

"A corsair here; tell me, sir, mask, are you awaiting your mistress fair, or bring you tidings to lovely maidens from across the sea?"

Tom disguised his voice very much indeed, as he replied, gallantly:

"Fair lady, if I sought my mistress, I should go no further; this sweet nymph's eyes would chain me here captive to their brightness."

"Fie—fie, you rovers of the sea are fickle lovers; but there, the nymph shall judge your worth. But remember, no oft-told vows of love—I shall be listening."

Before Minnie had time to retreat she had quickly retired, and the timid girl found herself alone with the dashing corsair.

Alone with his boyhood's love!

Tom's heart beat wildly.

He has not seen Minnie since the day when he had given her into the care of Lady Castlemaine. Since then, what an eventful career had been his!

A proscribed pirate, with a price upon his head! Now, escaped all dangers, he stood in the midst of pitiless foes, who would beat him down without mercy, there amid that revelry.

He thanked Lady Arbuthnot in his heart for choosing his corsair costume.

It was pleasing to meet Minnie there, dressed as he would have had her see him, if he had taken her on his daring voyages—dressed as he would have those who sought his life see him when he unmasked his face at the banquet that night.

Sorrowful as were her thoughts, she could not help feeling a strange interest awaken in her heart as she gazed on his handsome figure; but timid at being left there, she would have retreated after her companion if Tom had not quietly stepped to her side.

"Do not leave me, fair mask," he said; "I am very sad—sad as any corsair can be who has lost his lady-love. Hear my story, and you will pity me."

Tom's voice was excellently disguised.

He was standing in the shadow, too, so that Minnie might not see his eyes.

He feared she would discover him if once their glances met.

"It is a corsair's fate to be sad," Minnie replied, softly; "sad because of the dangers of their career; sad, because they are fickle in their loves, and can break a maiden's heart without remorse."

"A corsair loved a maiden once," our hero said, with some difficulty mastering his emotion, "but she was false to him."

"She did not break his heart. He took another bride—corsairs always do," Minnie said, dropping her fair head, for she was thinking of the boy-lover who had stolen her heart away.

"He took no other bride. He came amid danger—jeopardized his life, that he might seek his false-hearted bride, and demand why she had forsaken him."

"That was very brave. He should have given his love to a more worthy maiden. What did he say to her—was he very angry?"

"Not angry. He talked with her of his childhood; the days they had spent together wandering side by side, and vowing eternal love; he talked to her of the exciting dangers of his career, how he had been nearly stricken to the death; told her how he had been saved by his love token, which, lying over his heart, received the bullet, and asked her, if she had no longer

loved him, to give him back the pledge of love he gave her when they parted."

Minnie uttered a little cry of alarm and suspicion.

Her hand went swiftly to her fair bosom, and clutched at some relic treasured there—clutched as though to feel that it was safe.

"Speak," she cried, in a strangely anguished whisper, "who are you? If you know my story, oh, tell me, is it true that he sent me that cruel letter, renouncing our loves forever?"

Before our hero could reply, a harsh female voice was heard, saying:

"Left her with a corsair? Gracious me! Poor child, the worst thing you could have done—excite her mind; set her thinking of that worthless pirate! Why, she may run away!"

"By St. Patrick, and well she might," cried the voice of Admiral Lord Kilerew, "if I may judge of the man by the figure he cuts in his dress. See, there she is, and it's an elegant boy that same corsair is."

Lady Castlemaine, Lord Kilerew, Lieutenant Gaston and Lady Arbuthnot came forward.

"Lady," our hero said, quickly, in Minnie's ear, "believe not that he was false until he returns your love-token, which still guards his heart."

Stepping quickly back, he bowed gallantly to the new-comers.

"My child," Lady Castlemaine cried, with affected gayety, "I am glad to see this young corsair has not run off with you. Come, you shall listen to him in the dance. It is indiscreet to stay alone with a strange mask—gentlemen, *au revoir*."

Minnie gave our hero a wistful, imploring glance, as Lady Castlemaine took her by the arm and led her away.

Lady Arbuthnot went with them, but Lord Kilerew and Gaston stayed behind.

When she was gone, Tom stepped from the shadows that had hid him from the penetrating gaze of love.

Bowing slightly to Lord Kilerew and to Gaston, whom he recognized by his sinister looking eyes, he was about to leave the spot, when Lord Kilerew stayed him.

"St. Patrick's honor," he exclaimed, "I am pleased to meet so comely a gentleman. Come, sir, let us take wine, and drink the health of the fair guests of the revels—ho there, boy, bring the wine."

A page in the countess' livery ran forward with wine and goblets.

Filling the goblets, he handed one to each.

Lord Claremont came sauntering up the marble steps as the wine was passed around.

"I will join you, gentlemen," he said, laughing.

"And it's welcome you are, my bonny highwayman!" Lord Kilerew cried. "Fill another bumper, you spalpeen; and here's to good company, you highwaymen and pirates."

This was an allusion to Tom's corsair garb, and to Claremont, who was dressed as Claude Duval.

Hitherto, Gaston had said nothing. Now he came forward with a sneer upon his lips.

It was impossible that he could have even suspected that the man whom he had surrounded by soldiers and marched off to a secure cell was standing defiantly before him; but at the first glance, when his and Tom's eyes met, he felt an antipathy towards him that brought all his ill-humor in full display.

Perhaps, too, his temper was further roused by his meeting with Lady Arbuthnot, who passed him with contempt that cut him to the soul.

Something in his evil nature prompted him to speak and act maliciously.

Glancing towards Claremont, he said, in a sneering tone:

"Not over-respectable society; for highwaymen and pirates, I believe, are robbers alike; but our friend here steals only our friendship; this strange mask may have worse designs."

Tom's fingers clenched on the richly-chased goblet, as he replied, quickly:

"My friend, be wise; wearing a mask on a carnival like this may not always keep you out of a quarrel."

Gaston laughed savagely.

"A mettlesome corsair?" he cried. "Sir, I will drink your health, coupling therewith the health of the fair virgin with whom we found you practicing virtue."

"Away!" he cried. "Stay every hand! She is my bride, and thus do I snatch her from you. Stand forth, my gallant band—let them see the glitter of your steel! Aha! Behold, these are my boy rovers, and I am Captain Tom Drake!"

He plucked his mask aside, and stood revealed. Such a scene of confusion, alarm, and dismay as followed his action and speech!

Ladies shrieked and fainted; gentlemen sprang forward, their swords flashing from their sheaths; glasses and decanters crashed to earth.

Admiral Ellis reeled thunder-stricken. Lord Kilcrew, for the moment, stood dumb and motionless.

And then, as Minnie crept, with a glad cry, to her daring lover's breast, his gallant crew, armed to the teeth, with their masks and friar's cloaks thrown off, gathered around their dauntless leader, whose sword, already out of its scabbard, kept Lord Kilcrew at bay.

A strange hush followed the momentary hubbub of alarm.

Then the deep rattle of drums, as the alarm was beat in the distance.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CAVE OF TREASURE.

It is scarcely necessary to dwell upon the utter consternation into which Admiral Ellis and his party were thrown by the apparition of Captain Tom and his crew.

The suspicious movements of the cloaked friars had given Admiral Ellis an inkling of treachery; but even he was not prepared for what occurred.

Our hero's audacity, coupled with his mysterious escape from prison, staggered him.

He had heard of the supernatural attributes by means of which the Boy Cruiser eluded all his foes, and for the moment the idea stole upon his mind that Captain Tom was indeed in league with the Evil One.

As for the commodore, he was petrified, and could scarcely believe his eyes.

Admiral Lord Kilcrew was the first to break the spell Tom's presence had caused.

"And it's yourself, my young pirate captain, I see, at last," he cried. "St. Patrick, but I've been half around the world trying to meet you; but I tell you, man, to leave that lady's side, or it's amidst your own roystering crew will I cut you down!"

His bright sword flashed in the air.

"And, by Jinks!" little Lord Vane cried, "here's—aw—aw—devil—fiend, Captain Tom, again—aw—I wonder if he's got his sword of silver with him now?"

"You can test the blade, my lord," our hero said.

Lord Augustus Vane did not seem to relish the challenge.

He shrank back as the boy chieftain's bright eye flashed angrily upon the assembly.

Lords Moreton and Claremont, with Walpole, got near Tom.

"There'll be warm work presently," said Walpole. "I vote we take care of his bride."

Tom heard the young lord's remark, and his fingers angrily clutched his sword.

Admiral Ellis had by this time recovered his presence of mind.

His parchment visage was of a leaden hue.

His gray, piercing eyes were almost hidden by the wrinkles of his face.

"So, pirate!" he exclaimed, "the devil has helped you to break out of your prison, but you will need a thousand devils to save you now. It is fortunate that I have been prepared for any interference here, and much as I regret the bloodshed that must ensue, I will take care that this is the last of your escapades."

"Indeed!" (Tom's lips curled scornfully.) "Admiral Ellis, you have hunted me from sea to sea. Had you met me there, I would have shown you what a task my capture would have been. You boast of taking me. Bring forth your hidden soldiery; but let me tell you that as I came here unseen, so will I depart. Lift your hand for bloodshed—you shall have your fill of it. Not all your country's power shall capture me!"

Commodore Ellis here intervened.

"Pirate boy," he cried, "release that maiden. Take one hour's grace, and you may escape."

Our hero's bright cimenter glistened in the air.

"When I release this dear girl," he cried, "it shall be when my hand can no longer grasp my sword-hilt. When I am subdued it shall be when I lie still and prone at your feet."

He clasped Minnie affectionately to his breast.

Admiral Ellis drew his dress-sword from its scabbard.

With an angry cry he dashed his hand on the table.

"To arms," he cried. "Guard the way, men. Shoot down all who attempt to pass. A thousand pounds to those who take this buccaneer!"

The rattle of steel was heard as the soldiery fixed their bayonets.

The boy cruisers, armed with sword, pistol, and pike, gathered around their beloved leader.

One moment more, and Admiral Ellis would have given the signal for the attack on the daring intruders.

But at this juncture the young and lovely giver

of the banquet, the Countess St. Albans, laid her soft hand upon his arm.

"Let us have no bloodshed here," she exclaimed. "Oh, sir," she added, addressing our hero, "release that lady and depart. I promise that no one shall molest you."

Very gracefully Tom Drake bowed to the beautiful young countess.

"Madame," he said, "I shall not begin the work; but I have claimed my bride. More: I swear that this night's ceremony shall proceed. You shall witness the marriage, but I will be bridegroom to this bride!"

Minnie gave him a grateful look.

In their danger it pleased her to hear him say she should be his bride.

"There'll be two to have a word in that," exclaimed Lord Kilcrew, "besides the lady."

"I will hear the lady. If she consents, I want no other voice. Tell me, Minnie, are you willing to be my bride—will you wed me this night? Say that you will, and I will carry you to my ship—you shall be queen, and no power on earth shall come between us. Answer, Minnie; will you be mine?"

"Forever," Minnie answered, softly.

"God bless you for that promise! Thus I seal our vows!"

He drew her to his breast and fervently kissed her.

"Now, my lord," he cried to Kilcrew, "this quarrel is between us."

Admiral Ellis, livid with rage, sprang from where he stood, at the head of the table.

"Give the pirate no chance of mercy!" he yelled. "Take the lady while we make him prisoner."

"That is much sooner said than done," exclaimed Tom, stepping back and standing on his defense. "My gallant crew will deal with you. Now, my Lord Kilcrew, if you have any claims to make for my bride, follow to the chapel and contest it with your sword. If you can slay me, I yield her; if I am victor, I promise to leave you a corpse on the altar steps."

Admiral Ellis sprang upon our hero.

"Pirate! you shall never leave the hall alive except a prisoner!" he shouted.

Captain Tom put Minnie aside.

Very quietly he took the angry officer by the throat and, before any one could divine his intent, drew him amidst his boy followers.

"Now," he said, laughing lightly, "you are my prisoner. Lift a finger to your men, and I will brain you where you stand!"

Tom's sudden seizure of him had prevented all resistance, and he was a helpless captive before he had time to retreat.

Still, he would have ordered his soldiers, at any hazard, to shoot down his daring captor, but Lord Kilcrew stayed him.

"It shall be tried by me; if I fail I leave you to effect his capture."

"My Lord Kilcrew," said Tom, "I am about to fight you; our duel should be to the death; you are a brave man, but I shall conquer you. I will not take your life; you shall be spared to witness my marriage with my bride; my old friend, the commodore, shall give her away, and Admiral Ellis shall drink the happiness of the Rover's Queen."

Very daring he looked as he faced the excited assemblage.

The rays of the many lamps shone on his glittering mail, beneath which his bold heart throbbed with proud joy at the prospect of making Minnie his wife.

Lord Kilcrew looked at him as if he could not believe his ears.

Here was a proscribed pirate, betrayed and surrounded by armed soldiers, comparatively alone in the midst of his foes; doomed to certain death unless he could fight his way to the shore, and embark on his own vessel unharmed; yet who dared to speak to them in the terms of a conqueror.

Lord Walpole could not help admiring our hero's coolness.

As for the commodore his rage knew no bounds. Admiral Ellis had all the true characteristics of a thorough sea-going martinet, and under the influence of his chagrin at being taken prisoner, he would not have hesitated in giving the order for his soldiery to attack Tom's crew, even though his first word of command resulted—as it probably would—in his brains being blown out without further ceremony.

Our hero, who knew his distinguished hardihood and iron strength of nerve, had well arranged his programme beforehand, and the signal he now gave saved Admiral Ellis from all risks.

Two of the cruisers, seeing the admiral's mouth about to move, and having no doubt he was about to precipitate matters by ordering an immediate and murderous attack, kindly spared him the trouble by slipping a gag over his mouth,

and adroitly blindfolding him at the same moment.

Then Harry Vere, who was at the head of the shore party, placed the muzzle of a pistol against the little admiral's ear while Tom spoke.

"Commodore," he said, "your brother is in our power. Let there be a single drop of blood spilled, or a hand raised to obstruct our path, and his brains shall be scattered before your eyes. You are a brave man, commodore, but you know well Captain Tom Drake will keep his word!"

The stanch old commodore looked as if he would rather have eaten his own sword, scabbard and hilt in the bargain, than have been there at all.

He felt sometimes like a muzzled bull-dog, and glanced at our hero as if he thought he must be the very devil himself sent to torment him.

Ever since he had encountered our hero he had been in the very thick of failures and mortifications.

First there was Harry Vere's duel with Gaston; then his elopement with his fair niece, both at Tom's instigation.

After that came his mysterious disappearance from the chapel where they had had the consummate impudence to marry the runaway pair.

Then came his encounter with our hero, in which he had not only been worsted, but had to sink his ship, and now, when he fervently hoped his youthful opponent was miles and miles away, here was he turning up again.

First of all to get clapped into prison, and then, after escaping by magical or mysterious means, to intrude in that masquerade, and act with all the effrontery of a young conqueror.

"Well, commodore," said our hero who saw his puzzled look, "is it peace or war?"

"You young scoundrel, set my brother at liberty; let me take his place."

"No, commodore; where I to do that, he would not hesitate to sacrifice you."

"You dog, what new violence do you purpose now?"

"None, unless driven to it in self-defence. We shall proceed to her ladyship's chapel, where you shall witness the ceremony of marriage between me and this dear girl. After that—"

"Well, after that, you young devil, what then?"

"Why, then," Tom answered proudly, "as I have won my wife at the point of my sword, so with my sword's point I will maintain her."

He waved his hand, and his boy crew took the route to the chapel.

The soldiery dared not obstruct their progress, because of the jeopardy in which Admiral Ellis was placed.

The guests crowded after the daring adventurers, eager to see the result of so singular an interruption to the masquerade.

Lords Walpole, Claremont, Moreton and Vane kept close to our hero and his bride.

They were curious to witness the end of the adventure.

Admiral Lord Kilcrew stalked moodily in the rear.

He was waiting for an opportunity of crossing swords with the youthful sailor, who had defiantly dared him to single combat.

Almost in solemn silence they entered the picturesque chapel.

Minnie was very pale.

She realized the danger in which her young lover was placed, and, though willing to share his fate, she shivered at the thought that another half hour might see him lying cold and lifeless on the altar steps.

With our hero the matter was simple enough.

He meant to fight Lord Kilcrew, and then carry the little admiral with him on board his own vessel, there to keep him prisoner until he could depart safely.

Our hero was in advance with Minnie, who clung, half fainting, to his protecting arm.

At the door of the chapel he encountered Lady Arbuthnot, her face pale as a sheet, her looks wild and aghast.

Clutching Tom's arm, she whispered, hurriedly:

"You must fly. The soldiers are secreted outside the chapel, to shoot you as you come forth. There is no time for this rash ceremony. Bid only your boy crew enter, then shut the door and follow me—I will lead you to safety."

Captain Tom looked in the agitated face of his fair admonitress.

There was no mistaking the anxiety depicted on her face.

He did not like the idea of abandoning his enterprise.

There was something congenial to his daring nature in the thought of marrying Minnie in the midst of them all.

At the same time he felt that, hemmed in as he was by unseen dangers, it was scarcely advisable

to risk all for the sake of being wedded to Minnie in that place, especially as the ceremony could be performed equally as well on board his own ship.

He resolved to follow his lady friend's advice. A few words passed to Harry Vere explained his intent.

Lady Arbuthnot glided into the chapel first, then Tom and Minnie.

His boy crew followed two by two.

Admiral Lord Kilcrew was the first of those who came after.

He was stalking jauntily on, his hand on the hilt of his sword, when the chapel door, as his foot was on the very threshold, swung to and closed in his face.

This act was so sudden, so little what he expected from our hero, that the Irish nobleman tapped softly for admittance.

When he found he had been purposely shut out, his excited feelings knew no bounds.

In the most insulting terms he called upon Tom to turn and fight him.

Our hero heard his insulting challenge but Lady Arbuthnot would not suffer him to stay; she took his hand and led him on in darkness, his boy crew following.

In the center of the chapel she paused—a grating noise—a rush of cold air—then they descended one by one into pitch darkness.

Hardly was the last of the boy cruisers out of sight when the door was burst violently open and Admiral Lord Kilcrew, followed by the enraged soldiers, burst into the chapel.

They found no trace of the adventurers, but stumbled over the prone form of Admiral Ellis, who lay gagged and blindfolded in one corner of the chapel.

Lady Arbuthnot led our hero along what seemed to be a labyrinth of passages, until they discovered a faint streak of light in the distance, when she paused, and tenderly kissing Tom's hand, said:

"Follow the windings of this chamber till it leads you out by the sea. Be silent as you value your lives. God speed you."

The pressure of her hand was gone.

Our hero peered through the darkness but her sylph-like form had vanished.

Keeping on in the direction indicated he wandered for some considerable time without finding the expected outlet.

He had, in fact, lost the glimpse of moonlight which at first promised to guide them.

"We are out of our course," he whispered to Harry Vere.

"There is a light yonder," his young lieutenant said.

Tom looked.

There was a light—a peculiar, glittering light. It shone as if from a sullen cavern some distance before them.

It was an unearthly, spectral light.

Not like the gleam of the moon but a cold, dull glisten of many colors enshrined in inky darkness.

Continuing their way onward for some few minutes brought them to the explanation of the mystic light.

The spectacle they beheld was so startling that one and all forgot their danger and gave vent to exclamations of amazement at the scene before them.

It was a narrow, oblong cave.

The walls were reeking with the moisture of ages, but the trickling stones were lit up by a row of curious-looking lamps, in each of which burned a blue flame that seemed to have burned for ages undimmed.

These were the first cause of the lights, but on the damp, slimy floor, where lizards, newts and horrible snakes crawled and coiled, were heaped in wild profusion the rarest and most wonderful jewels.

Emeralds of the largest size, uncut rubies, pearls, diamonds, lying in odd-looking piles, each costly heap emitting its dull, sickly glare of colored light.

Here and there a snake crawled in and out of a whitened skull, of which there were many, but otherwise the cave showed no relics of the presence of human beings.

The Boy Rovers gazed in breathless surprise at their new Aladdin's cave.

Some stepped forward to admire the costly gems.

Even Minnie raised herself to look around at the strange sight, while Harry Vere, with a cry of delight, scooped up a handful of the finest emeralds, and gave them to his youthful leader.

And then, by one accord, they commenced to load themselves with the shining gems.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ADMIRAL ELLIS PLAYS A LOSING GAME.

We will not follow our heroes through the windings of that underground passage, nor accompany them in the hazardous incidents of their flight to the shore.

Enough that that the young rovers knew that their lives depended on their speedily reaching their vessel, and that their daring chieftain, with his accustomed dauntless energy and fearlessness of design, got them by stratagem and audacity through every peril, and that daybreak saw them pulling manfully in two open boats towards the *Will o'-the-Wisp*.

Here they were gladly received, Zelic joyously greeting her beloved boy adventurer, though a sad look clouded her fair brow as she took Minnie into her care.

The young rovers had been hotly pursued, but they had time to signal their coming as they left the shore, and those on board had lost no time in making all ready for immediate departure so soon as they got their idolized chieftain on board, and with wild enthusiasm they heard the order given in his firm, commanding tone to unfurl every sail and stand out for sea.

The orders were being carried out with alacrity, and every heart was bounding at the prospect of a fresh cruise, for they had been long enough on those coasts, when a red light shot up from shore, and boom came the roar of a gun from the port.

An instant after a score of warning lights blazed in different directions, and the ships at anchor were signaled by the authorities as follows:

"Pirates—escape—visit every bark—pour a broadside into any vessel making for sea."

"Oh," said Tom, as his crew gathered blankly around him on reading these signals, which were rapidly transmitted from ship to ship, "they mean to stop us at last."

"Let me see; if we remain here we shall be visited and taken; if we attempt to run out we must stand the risk of being blown in the air."

He happened at this juncture to catch sight of Smuggler Joe.

That worthy, having no wish to take a journey in the pirate bark, or be on board while she was made the target of the frigates' guns, was trying his hand at communicating with the shore by innocently leaning over the vessel's side and waving to and fro a small lantern, which he had managed to purloin unseen.

He was so deeply engaged in this interesting occupation that he did not hear the quick tread of Captain Tom as he stepped angrily toward him, and was only made aware of his little game being discovered by receiving a blow under the ear from the fiery young chieftain's hand, which lifted him off his feet and sent him rolling head over heels, uncertain whether he was hurled down the hold or tumbling overboard to Davy Jones' locker.

His trickery had, however, succeeded.

His light had been seen and understood.

Not from shore, but by a big ship.

One of their warlike neighbors, which now bore down upon the graceful vessel, her decks swarming with armed men.

Her guns run out at the port-holes and bristling, ready to belch forth a thundering broadside.

Captain Tom Drake took the speaking trumpet and walked aft, as the heavy man-of-war sidled up to him.

Day was just breaking, and in the hazy light he could see that several other vessels of like armament were standing under easy sail to block his passage.

There was no chance of running the gauntlet, and he waited till the quarter-deck of the big liner came towering above his.

A tall young officer stood on the poop.

Several junior officers were congregated around him.

A party of marines were drawn up in the rear, their bayonets glistening in the creeping light.

Short as the warning had been, every preparation had been made for the combat.

The sailors were at their posts, some by the guns, others on the yards and cross-trees ready to reef sails, or assist in other duties of working the ship.

And our hero, though inwardly wishing his huge blockader seven leagues away, could not but admire the precision and celerity with which all was made taut and trim.

"Ahoy, there!" presently rang out from the young officer's trumpet.

"Ahoy, ho!" Tom said, in reply.

"There's a party coming from shore to board you; we're to keep you under our guns till they arrive."

"Thank you," Tom said, with a light laugh.

It crossed his daring brain, even then, to whisk suddenly from under their bows, and give them a run for it, armed as they were.

The officer seemed chagrined.

"You can take that as notice," he sang out, "and if you stir a ship's length I'll fire into you." Tom's face flushed excitedly.

"For a wager," he cried, "I would, even now, you 'longshore lubbers, run my ship from under your nose! and as for firing into us, we've guns aboard."

A sensation was observable on the liner's quarter-deck, but the officer who had spoken, replied:

"I never wager with pirates, but if you want to try your mettle, run your ship a length from us, and you can have your fill."

The angry light deepened in the dark eyes of the proud boy cruiser.

His breast throbbed with fierce excitement.

It made his blood course hotly through his veins to endure the taunting challenge.

Stamping his foot upon the deck, he turned haughtily away.

For a moment his fierce eyes ran along the daring faces of his crew, and seemed about to give the word to light up the scene with the red flash of a broadside, and dash from the liner's side.

But he conquered his stubborn pride, and kept his rage to himself.

There was light enough now for them to see a boat push off from the shore.

Lusty strokes propelled it towards the ship, and they recognized, seated in the stern, their old enemy, Admiral Ellis, and his bluff brother—the commodore.

A party of mariners, with bayonets fixed, sat behind the rowers.

Little Jennie turned pale as she saw the deadly look on her father's ashy face.

Minnie crept close to Tom.

Zelic stood close to the bulwarks, gazing moodily at the advancing boats.

The least careworn face among the crew was Harry Vere's.

He seemed to relish the idea of a visit from his irate father-in-law, and there was a rellicking look in his eyes as he looked from the thin, cadaverous visage of the admiral, to the grim countenance of the old commodore.

Admiral Ellis was ghastly with passion and triumph.

He glared at the boy cruisers, whom he now deemed doomed, and as soon as he came near enough, his iron tones rang out:

"Keep a sharp eye on the pirates. If they resist my going on board fire at the leader."

He shook his arm at our hero, who was listlessly leaning against the mast.

"We have you," he cried, "and will see if a rope can't take a little of the bravado out of you."

Tom smiled, but made no movement, though his dauntless followers eagerly watched for a signal from him to begin the desperate conflict.

Jennie Vere shivered, and shrieked slightly, when she heard her father's agitated voice.

But Harry Vere slid his arm around her slender waist, and whispered, lovingly:

"Do not fear your father's rage, Jenny. We are protected against all he can do."

The boat grated against the vessel's side.

Two of the boy rovers, who were at the side, armed and prepared to dispute the passage, looked inquiringly at their leader.

Tom Drake walked to the vessel's side as the foremost mariners touched the ropes to ascend by.

"Admiral Ellis," he said, quietly, "do you wish to come aboard?"

"Do I wish, you lawless ruffian! I'll let you see. Mount, men—present—be ready to fire!"

Minnie Atherton ran towards Tom, screaming at his danger.

But the young chieftain gently put her aside.

"Not so fast, Admiral Ellis," Tom said, "I am commander here. A word from me, and not only you, but all that sit in the boat with you, would have a bullet through their hearts—ay, though we are under the guns of your ships. But you are welcome to come aboard. Stand aside, lads, and let them pass."

Admiral Ellis grinned savagely.

He was the first of the party who mounted the ladder. The commodore followed.

Then, two by two, the marines stepped on deck.

Jenny, as full as ever of filial love, broke from her youthful husband's arm, and ran towards her father, but the angry old officer moved her away.

"Back, unworthy girl," he cried; "when your unholy union with that pirate is severed by death, then only will I receive you as my daughter."

Harry Vere's face flushed, as Jennie fell sobbing in his arms.

"Admiral Ellis," he cried, "you are a surly old bear, and thus I snap my fingers at you."

The admiral's parchment-like face was livid with fury.

"And thus," he cried, "do I end forever your career of infamy. Cover the two pirate leaders, men. Present—make ready. Aha! Now—now. One word from me, pirates—one word—"

"Shall never be given," the deep tones of Ben Barnacle exclaimed, as Minnie Atherton ran to her boyish lover, to shield his breast from the dreaded volley, while Jennie stood between her husband and the marines, whose loaded muskets were leveled at his heart, "for all that you do here, vindictive old man, your country's laws and the king's authority shall make you answer for. Smother your hate, Admiral Ellis. See—here is the protection to this ship, and her crew. Behold! The king's royal hand. Your prey escapes you. In the teeth of your armed soldiery—in the teeth of those bristling men-of-war creeping to destroy us, I wave their shield and safe-guard—the Royal Letter of Marque, against which not even you dare raise a finger!"

A thrill rang along the deck.

Admiral Ellis, stricken to the heart, staggered dizzily back.

Minnie, with a glad cry, nestled to Tom's heart, while those on board the man-of-war looked curiously on the scene they could only imperfectly understand.

Recovering himself a little, the admiral, trembling in his baffled rage at the very thought of his victim's escape, with a husky cry of fury, dashed the hated parchment from Ben Barnacle's hold, and as it fell to the deck, where Harry Vere carefully put his foot before it, exclaimed to the young lieutenant:

"Coward, trickster, craven, white-livered boy! have you the baseness to take refuge under this miserable subterfuge. Stand from my daughter. Draw your sword, and here, on your pirate captain's deck, meet me like a man, if you have the heart to face an angered father's rage."

He ground out the words savagely.

His gray eyes blazed with frightful fury.

Jenny Vere turned her sad, imploring countenance up to her husband, who seemed to enjoy immensely the old fellow's rage.

"Why, you savage old bear," he cried, "if it were not for your daughter's sake, I should be tempted to forget your gray hairs."

Admiral Ellis stamped his foot on the deck.

His mouth was covered with foam.

He would have leaped upon the young lieutenant, whose galling words stung him to the soul, if Captain Tom had not stepped between them, as Ben Barnacle picked up the letter of marque.

"Sir," he said, "no duels while I am commander here."

In an instant the little old admiral's fury was turned upon him.

"Another beardless trickster," he cried. "Pirate, if there is a trace of manliness in the scum of your accursed nature, give me satisfaction—give me satisfaction!"

Our hero smiled quietly.

"You're in a precious hurry to eat fire with somebody," he said.

"No quibbling, cur. Are you a coward, too?"

"You are at liberty to find out," Tom said, "whenever you please."

"Now—now!" yelled the excited old officer, unsheathing his sword.

"Not so. When I fight you, Admiral Ellis, it shall be when I am on my quarter-deck and you on yours—the smoke and flame of battle raging between us. So, when you are disposed, take out a rival letter of marque, and come across the sea to fight us."

Admiral Ellis snapped his sword asunder, as if it had been glass, and hurled the pieces to the deck, stamping them under foot in the mad paroxysm of his ungovernable rage.

"Oh, that I could drag the chicken hearts out of your coward breasts!" he cried, huskily.

He fell back, reeling and ghastly.

Two of the marines caught him in their arms.

Timidly and fearfully, Jenny ran towards her father.

It wrung her gentle breast to see him so overcome with hate and baffled vengeance.

"Father, dear father," she cried, falling on her knees at his feet, "forgive me. Oh, uncle, intercede with him for pardon for his child."

The commodore's eyes filled with tears.

He turned his head away to hide his emotion.

The wrathful admiral, bounding from those who held him, spurned his daughter with his foot.

"Hence!" he cried. "Shrink from a father's rage—cringe in your miscreant pirate's arms—live with him in infamy and unforgiveness."

"Oh, father—father! spare me!" shrieked the sobbing girl.

"Live with him, I say, unforgiven—live with him accursed. Die with my bitter curses heaped upon your head—die spurned—forsaken—accursed."

He reeled again in his mad excitement.

Jenny fell back, weeping as if her heart would break, and trying, with her fingers thrust in her ears, to shut out her father's curse.

Harry Vere's eyes flashed furiously as he held her to his breast.

The purple veins stood swollen upon his temple.

One hand clutched his sword-hilt.

Had it been any other but her father, his sword would have drunk the blood of the man who cursed and spurned his gentle wife.

Admiral Ellis threw his arms wildly in the air, and raving like a madman, sprang to the vessel's side.

"Withdraw!" he shouted to the man-of-war.

"We are cheated—tricked by the pirates! Withdraw—wrap your guns in lavender! The kings, decree, curse them, is their shield—we are baffled of our revenge!"

This was no time or place for Admiral Ellis to question the validity of the royal seal, or seek to know where the young rover—or by what means—got the letter of marque, but he dared not risk a breach of duty, and retired, while our hero's gallant crew made the air ring with the name of Captain Tom Drake.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CURSE OF THE SEA EMERALD.

ONCE safely out of British waters, Captain Tom's mind went back to the famous and fatal sea emerald.

Even the exquisite joy of having his beloved Minnie on board could not turn him from his purpose.

It was not his intention to keep his beloved on board the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*.

Ever looking upon Zelig as his slave, it was scarcely respectful to his wife to bring them into daily contact. How could he explain satisfactorily the Oriental's protracted stay on board his ship.

He sought Harry Vere, and discussed the unpleasant subject with him.

"What do you propose, sir?" asked Harry Vere.

"That our wives be at once sent to America. I have influential friends there."

"Could we not take them?"

Captain Drake thought deeply for a moment.

"Be it so," he said; and the subject dropped.

Tom secretly chafed at the delay, but fortunately they had fair weather and good winds, and it was not long ere the gallant *Will-o'-the-Wisp* was leaving American waters on her way to the Mediterranean.

He disguised the character of the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* as much as possible, and discharged much of his valuable store for such improved arms as might prove acceptable to the Turkish government.

His eyes regained their old light as they fell upon sunlit Constantinople.

It seemed as though the very thoughts of the emerald lent its own dreadful light to them.

And that wondrous and fatal stone—what of it? We will precede our hero awhile into the city of the faithful.

From the towers of the lofty minarets the muezzin's monotonous voice could be heard calling the faithful to prayer.

The followers of Mohammed obeyed the call, and leaving their slippers at the door of the mosque, entered the sacred building and were soon prostrate before the believers' shrine.

There was one among the faithful in that vast city upon whom the sacred call fell unheeded.

It was Imaun Bey, the possessor of the sea emerald.

He sat cross-legged upon a pile of cushions, hugging the priceless gem to his heart.

Fondling and speaking to the inanimate stone as though it were a thing of life.

He had heard of its fell properties, but secure in his chamber, a keen cimeter and a loaded pistol within his reach, he scoffed at the mystically fearful legend.

The merchant's heart thrilled with wild, tumultuous joy as he feasted his eyes upon the lambent fire which glittered from the gem and lit up his face with a pale, sickly light.

"Mine—mine!" he said, as he pressed his lips to the fatal gem. "Imaun Bey, the prophet has given thee that which the whole wealth of the empire cannot buy."

The rustling of the silken curtains caused him to start and hide the jewel in his breast. The other hand was stretched forward menacingly toward the naked cimeter, which lay near.

Lena entered as his finger touched the hilt.

"Fear not, uncle," she said, "it is I."

"Fear! Oh, my daughter, why should I fear?"

"Your hasty clutch at the cimeter."

"It was but—but—"

"I can fathom its cause. Oh, my uncle, that gem with its fearful curse!"

Her uncle pressed the sea emerald closer to his heart.

"Hush, girl! by the Prophet! Think you I am

going to be frightened from its possession by the lying stories of those cut-throat pirates?"

Lena stepped softly to the merchant's side, and sinking her voice, whispered:

"Uncle, the cadi—"

Imaun Bey sprang up as though he had been shot.

"The cadi!" he repeated, turning pale. "What of him, girl?"

"His messenger is below, and seeks an audience. Be careful, uncle; the report of that accursed jewel has reached his ears."

"Allah be merciful!" gasped the merchant. "He will seek to wrest it from me. Run, girl, to the small box in my safe, and bring me an old leather case you will find inside."

Lena was quitting the chamber when her trembling uncle added:

"When you have brought the case, then let the cadi's messenger be admitted. Not till then—not till then."

The girl left the chamber, and Imaun Bey fell back upon the soft cushions, half stupid with despair.

"The cadi," he murmured. "Allah is great. Ten rose-colored diamonds I gave the cadi but a week since to close his eyes, when the pirate ships came into the harbor."

Lena reappeared and gave her uncle the case, and as he emptied the glittering contents into his open palm, the look of fear was superseded by an expression of dry cunning.

A small shower of glittering gems fell into his hand. From among them he selected an emerald not one-third the size of the priceless gem which had been fished from the bottom of the sea.

To exchange them was the work of a moment, and giving Lena the leather case, he said:

"Hide it—hide it. The sea emerald is inside. Yes, that will do—under the cushion. Now admit the cadi's messenger."

Imaun Bey, secretly chuckling over his scheming, awaited the coming of the avaricious functionary's servant.

"If," he murmured, "the cadi wants the jewel, may Allah blind his eyes, and enable this to pass for it."

He placed the small gem in a fold of his turban, just as Lena appeared on the threshold.

Behind came the messenger, a short, thick-set Moslem, whose dark eyes glanced furtively around the chamber, and Imaun's heart leaped when he found that his glance rested upon the very spot where the sea emerald was hidden.

Wiping the cold drops of fear from his brow, the merchant bowed his head, saying:

"What does your master, the most happy of the faithful, require of his servant, Imaun Bey?"

"Know, oh, Imaun," said the messenger, "a report has gone about that you have among your jewels a stone of such monstrous size that its value cannot be calculated by golden pieces."

"And does," Imaun asked, trembling, "our master give heed to such idle stories? Imaun's very poor, and the best jewel he possesses the mighty cadi would not ornament his chibouque with."

The messenger thought of the rose-colored diamonds, and answered, drily:

"The cadi would see this jewel, oh, Imaun, that he may judge if report speaks truly."

"We are all the cadi's and Allah's servants, and their will must be done. Here, take this—be careful. Imaun's poor, and can ill afford to lose even this stone that lying tongues have magnified into such wondrous value."

He placed the emerald in the messenger's hand. Then, as the man left the chamber, a cunning leer came over his face, and he muttered:

"Thou art great, oh, cadi, in thy cunning, but Imaun is greater. Allah be praised!"

Had the merchant known the messenger's thoughts, as he went slowly back to the cadi's house, he would not have been so confident in his powers.

"Son of a jackass!" thought the messenger; "and does he try to throw dust in our eyes? May his beard grow white with the lies he utters. By Allah, it was good that I followed that dark-eyed houri, or else had I not seen the dog change the jewels."

He reached the awful presence of the gray-bearded, rapacious old cadi, and bowed with slavish humility.

The old tyrant gave a growl when his messenger appeared, and blurted out:

"Well, dog, have you the sea emerald?"

"The slave has a jewel of that name."

He held the stone to the cadi as he spoke.

"By the beard of the holy prophet!" the cadi growled, "the lying tongue of the black slave shall be torn from his mouth!"

The cadi alluded to Imaun Bey's servant, whom he placed in the house as a spy.

"Wherefore, oh, prince," asked the bearer of the emerald, "this anger?"

The keen little restless gray eyes were fixed upon the speaker as the cadi roared:

"Wherefore do you mock me, slave? Is this stone of a size with a black fowl's egg? Does its luster send a sheen over my face?"

"It doth not, my prince."

"Ussof," said the cadi, viciously, "the cunning twinkle in thine eyes tells me there is another stone. Is it so?"

"Thy slave has eyes."

"Yes."

"Thy slave has feet."

"Yes—yes."

"Thy slave used his feet."

"Yes—well?"

"And followed the miser Imaun to his chamber."

"Ha! go on, good USSOF."

"His eyes looked through the curtains."

"USSOF, thou art in our favor—go on."

"And he saw Imaun Bey place the sea emerald in a bag instead of this."

"USSOF, there will be a post for thee to fulfill. Good USSOF, thou shalt be our pipe-bearer—go on."

"Thy servant saw it hidden and marked the spot."

"Mark this day, USSOF, with a white stone in thy life. Good USSOF, go on with thy story; our ears are pleased with it."

"When thy servant left the house of Imaun Bey—that dog! May a jackass defile his grave!"

"And," added the cadi, "may the curse of Allah freeze his heart, may his food be pebbles, and his bed thorns!"

"Allah, listen to thy words, O cadi."

"Thy story, good USSOF."

"When thy slave brought with him the small stone, he came to thy presence with a joy hung upon his soul."

"Why thus, good USSOF?"

"Oh, my prince, USSOF is not fit to eat dirt in thy presence, or he would have plunged his yataghan in Imaun's heart, and brought thee the mystic jewel of the ocean's bed."

The cadi's eyes began to twinkle, and his heart fill with a greedy avarice for the priceless gem.

USSOF's words suggested a safe means of being the happy possessor, and beckoning his servant towards him, he said:

"Remember thou those words which Imaun's slave overheard the pirate who sold the jewel say when he gave it to yonder dog?"

"Yes, my prince; he spoke thus:

"*Imaun, guard well thy treasure; let not its luster be seen by man, or thy life will pay for its possession.*"

"Was that all, USSOF?"

Again the messenger was silent.

"He told him, oh, cadi, that it might be death to all who held it; told him that when the time was near for it to pass from his hands, the effulgent light would fade for a time, and a film of blood will appear to warn him of death."

"USSOF, my soul longs for this wondrous jewel. Go seek Nuline-Geni; but if the film of blood has passed over the stone, is it as —"

He whispered the remainder of the sentence, and USSOF, with a dark smile, touched the silver hilt of his yataghan, and backed out of the house.

"So, dog that thou art," the cadi muttered, "thou would pass this upon us for the wondrous stone whose mystic powers foretell the time of death. By the soul of my father, the wondrous gem once mine, I'll, I'll —"

The cadi paused.

He had suddenly recalled to his mind the fearful curse which came with the possession of the coveted treasure.

"By the tomb of the Prophet," he mused, "but it tells only of the death of its possessor. Even so, it is but little to live for such a mean treasure, and a cadi, surrounded by guards, cannot be bound. Speed back with thy gift, USSOF. Once mine, I'll defy its curse."

He clapped his hand for his pipe-bearer, and under the soothing influence of the opium-drugged narghile he indulged in the prospective ownership of the famous mystic gem.

USSOF reached the merchant's house as the twinkling stars began to glimmer from the blue canopy above. USSOF knocked softly at the door, and waited for Nuline, the merchant's slave, to admit him.

The brain of the cadi's servant was ripe with a new purpose. The wish to obtain the emerald had crept over him as he walked slowly from the palace.

"The cadi," he thought, "shall possess this treasure; but may Allah turn USSOF from the gates of Paradise if he does not yet become master of the priceless gem."

Many schemes were ripe in his brain.

He knew he should have the gem in his keeping that night unless his arm failed in slaying

the merchant; but to keep it he knew would be impossible.

The cadi would discover him, no matter where he hid, then the bowstring would be his portion.

"No," he mused, "the cadi shall have the stone. When I have made every preparation for flight, the same weapon can obtain for me what it has to obtain for the cadi."

Revolving this matter in his mind, he forgot the length of time that had elapsed since he applied for admission.

Again the summons was repeated.

The same result followed. The door remained secure, and not a sound or sign was heard in the diamond merchant's house.

"The curse of the prophet be upon Nuline," he muttered, angrily; "has he forgotten my summons?"

Again and again he tried, until tired of waiting, he growled out an angry curse upon the black slave, and gliding to the back of the house, noiselessly scaled the wall.

* * * * *

When USSOF left the merchant's, Imaun Bey took the sea-emerald from the leather case, and chuckling with glee, bestowed fond endearments upon his treasure.

"Ha—ha!" he laughed, "the cadi will treasure the worthless imitation of this wonderful prize, while I shall be no more troubled by his accursed greedy demands."

He held the shining gem at arm's length, and gazed with silent admiration at the sparkling light that gleamed from the wondrous jewel.

As his greedy eyes devoured the beautiful gem, an exclamation of astonishment, not unmixed with dread, came from his lips.

A crimson mist had suddenly risen over the stone, eclipsing the myriad sparks of fire, and throwing a blood-colored hue over his face and form.

Imaun Bey saw his reflection in a long mirror opposite, and shuddering with deadly fear, he sat in speechless terror.

"The death warning!" he gasped at length.

"No—no! I cannot die and leave —"

The crimson hue, so blood-like, faded as quickly as it came, and Imaun, with a cry of joy, clutched the jewel to his heart, and jumped to his feet.

"It is the flicker of the lamp!" he cried; "I am growing dull with the lying stories of the death omen."

He clapped his hands, and Nuline came noiselessly inside the chamber.

Had not the merchant's nerves been so unstrung by his late fear, he would have noticed that Nuline must have been behind the silken hangings, by the instant answer to his summons.

He pointed to the lamp which hung by massive chains of wrought silver from the center of the apartment, and said:

"Dog, what is this?"

The black made no reply, but glancing furtively around the chamber, he came swiftly towards his master.

The merchant's hand was in his breast, clutching the mystic jewel to his heart, and Nuline, when he came within a few paces from where his master stood, drew a bright-bladed knife from his waist, and with one bound sprang upon Imaun Bey.

Totally unprepared for this attack, Imaun was unable to grasp the drawn cimeter which lay upon the cushions, and the black, with murder in his eyes, drove the keen blade into his master's heart.

The bey fell without a murmur, his warm blood bedaubing the silken cushions.

"Mine—mine!" said the black, tearing open the fingers which had closed upon the fatal gem—"mine, and I am rich—rich, and can buy slaves and keep a harem of beautiful women."

He sat upon a cushion and gazed with joyous rapture at his prize.

He held it so that the light fell upon the ocean's treasure, and laughing aloud in his glee, the murderer pressed the fatal gem to his lips.

"Bags of gold," thought Nuline, "yonder dead man gave for you—heaps of yellow, shining treasure—and I have got thee for one blow. Ha—ha! Rich—rich—rich!"

He held the sparkling emerald at arm's length, and watched the thousand lights as they sparkled in his trembling palm.

And as he watched, the green light suddenly faded, and the forerunner of death arose like a misty vapor before him.

Like the late possessor, the dead Imaun Bey, the black glanced upward at the lamp, imagining that the flickering light from the untrimmed cotton had caused the sudden change, for the wondrous brilliancy returned to the sea emerald, and Nuline, with a cry of joy, arose to fly from the house before the murder should be discovered.

His foot was upon the silken drapery and his

hand stretched forward to draw the curtains aside. Before he could touch the heavy folds he fell back with a half-smothered cry of terror falling from his lips.

USSOF, with naked weapons and set teeth, stood before him.

The black was unarmed, and at the mercy of the cadi's servant; but he thought not of his safety.

His only thought was for the blood-bought treasure, and retreating from USSOF he placed the gem in his bosom.

The fellow's quick eye told him all that had passed, and closely following Nuline he said in his fierce accents:

"Murderer, where is the emerald you have stolen from your victim?"

"By the sacred tomb of the Prophet!" said Nuline, "I know not of what you speak."

"Liar! yonder dead body tells its own story. Give it up to me or you die."

Nuline saw that parley or denial would be useless with his accuser, and with a cry like a caged panther he sprang upon USSOF.

The latter was thrown off his guard for a moment by the sudden attack.

Already had the slave's sinewy fingers begun to tighten around his neck.

Another moment and he would have been placed beside the stiffening form upon the pale silken cushions.

With a mighty effort he shook his sword arm free, and dropping the blade, he plucked a curved dagger from his sash.

The act was seen by the black, and he strove with all the force of his giant strength to hurl his opponent to the ground.

Before he could do so, the long blade of USSOF's dagger was plunged in his back, severing the vertebrae, and with the withdrawal of the weapon Nuline fell upon the soft Persian carpet a corpse.

Then USSOF sought and found the sea emerald, and hiding it in the folds of his turban, he placed the dead body of the slave beside his master, and left the house as he came, unheard and unnoticed.

So quiet had the double tragedy taken place, that Lena, although sleeping in the next chamber, heard not a sound.

The sea emerald was fulfilling its terrible mission, and bearing out the mystic skill of its terrible finder, whose hand had plucked it from the ocean's depths.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

STILL MORE WONDER FOLLOWS THE WAKE OF THE "SEA EMERALD."

WHEN USSOF reached the cadi's house he found his master in a state of excitement.

"Good USSOF," he said, "thy face tells me that the wondrous gem is mine."

USSOF took the gem from his turban, and prostrating himself, said:

"Thy servant was but in time, or the wondrous treasure would have been far away."

The cadi eagerly clutched the blood-bought emerald, and concealing it beneath his robe, said:

"Far away, good USSOF? Did he know that we had discovered his trickery?"

"That, my master, he was beyond the power of divining."

"Ha, speak USSOF. There is blood upon the hilt of the weapon. Did the dog resist our wishes?"

"No, my master; he was dead before I reached the place."

"Dead!"

As the cadi repeated the word, a cold shudder passed over his frame. He thought of the emerald jewel he now possessed, and its mystic curse.

"Yes, dead, my master—slain by the hand of his slave."

"The black, USSOF?"

"Yes, oh, my master. He aspired to the possession of the wondrous jewel."

"By my soul, USSOF!" continued the cadi, "the dog deserved death!"

"He received his deserts, oh, my master. Thy slave's rapier became red with his base blood."

"You did well. Here, USSOF, take this as the forerunner of our goodness to thee."

He gave USSOF the small emerald that the unfortunate merchant had sent as a bribe.

USSOF, with deep reverence, received the gift. Kissing the hem of the cadi's robe (a general mode of expressing gratitude among the Easterns), he poured forth a long speech, in which the cadi, according to USSOF's opinion, was the most generous of men, and ought to sit upon a sultan's throne, instead of being but an humble servant of the Ottoman dynasty.

The cadi smiled. Flattery was to him a sweet and grateful ear-tickler.

"We will not forget thee, Usof." He lowered his voice as he added: "Much may be done towards putting us in positions we both should occupy."

"Oh, my master, I am unworthy of a thought."

"You are excessively good, Usof," said the cadi, complimentarily. "We have now much wealth and money, and my friend will do much with the vizier."

"Thy servant begins to see thy meaning."

"I will tell thee, Usof. Come nearer."

Usof came to the edge of the divan upon which the cadi was seated.

"Now hearken," said the aspiring Mussulman.

"The time may come, Usof, when thou shalt become cadi of this town."

"Oh, my master, my soul is filled with gratitude. What wilt thou be?"

"I," said the cadi, stroking his beard complacently, "will be the governor of this province."

Usof started. The cadi's aspiration was not impossible to attain. That the cringing servitor knew.

Money, judiciously employed, would, at the time of which we write, attain for the lowest positions of trust and emolument.

Usof, soon after, took his leave of the doomed possessor of the sea emerald.

Already had the shadow of evil fallen upon the possessor of the mystic jewel.

The cadi, as he hugged his treasure to his heart, little imagined that a pair of fiend-like eyes were peering out from a pair of curtains, beholding every sparkle of the mystic gem.

When Usof came to the cadi's chamber upon his return from the merchant's house, the seraskeer (general) of the troops which garrisoned the town was on his way to seek an interview with the magistrate.

He was not one of the cadi's best friends, and seeing the favorite servant hurrying up the marble passage, the seraskeer hid himself near the chamber door with the comment:

"There is much meaning in yonder dog's look. I will listen."

If there was one passion stronger than another in the heart of Ratchet Bey, the seraskeer, it was avarice. Gold he loved; not as misers love the tempting metal—Ratchet Bey loved it for the honor it brought to the happy possessor.

The seraskeer's next passion was power—the command of some two thousand wild Moslems did not (to him) come within the meaning of the word.

He had grown gray beneath the star and crescent banner, and in spite of his long service he had remained poor.

The seraskeer had often wondered why others, who had but little claim to the country's gratitude, should receive high distinction from the Sublime Porte.

He thought the matter over, until by chance he discovered that worth was not the key to the mystery. A handsome present to the chief vizier was, he found, of more utility than a hundred scars received beneath the sacred flag.

The seraskeer's limited means had prevented him from greasing the chief minister's palm; but now, as he listened to the conversation between the cadi and his servant, his eyes shone with joy.

Here, at last, was an opportunity for him to become rich, and perhaps, after all, he should become a governor of one of the provinces.

Once in that position, the seraskeer knew he could dispense justice at a certain price—i. e., those who sent the heaviest bribe would have the decision in their favor.

With roseate visions of future greatness fleet- ing before his eyes, the seraskeer crept away from the lady's chamber.

"So," he thought, "the cadi has wealth—that wealth a wonderful jewel—and the dog would become governor. Oh, Allah! thy servant seest how great thou hast been in directing his steps to yon presumptuous dog's chamber. By the prophet's sacred beard it was well."

He paced to and fro in the silent court-yard, and many cunning schemes came to his brain.

Once he had made up his mind to have the cadi slain, and possess himself of the jewel.

But mature reflection dismissed that idea.

He had a better and surer mode, by exciting the cupidity of others.

He wanted not the jewel, but he knew the power it would bring.

"There is but one God," he murmured, "and that is Allah, and Mahomet is prophet. Yes, this is the plan of Allah's servant. First I will tell the governor of the gem. He will take it from the cadi. Then I will tell the vizier, when the governor has it, and he, Allah be praised! will, perhaps, have the governor bowstrung. Then I will ask the vizier for the governor's place. If he does not give it to me, then—I will let the sultan know the wonderful gem is in his vizier's

possession. Yes, Ratchet Bey, Allah is good to thee, and thou art, I hope, thankful.

* * * * *

With the jeweled amber mouthpiece of his narghili between his lips, the cadi reclined upon a heap of silken cushions.

There was a glow of happiness upon his face, and a feeling of joy in his heart.

Between each puff of the perfumed herb he would mutter parts of the Koran, and his professed sense of Allah's goodness.

"Am I not," he said, "the richest cadi in the land of the faithful? Have I not a gem in a leathern bag, inside my breast, worth all the gold in Byzantium? Allah be praised, I have, good Allah—good cadi—good Maho—"

A Nubian entered the chamber.

"Dog!" roared the magistrate, "darest thou appear before me—before the richest cadi of all the cadies? Dog, I will have thy neck twisted, thy head chopped off, thy feet blistered. So go, jackass, go!"

The possession of so much wealth was turning the cadi's brain.

Had he taken the jewel from its case while speaking, he would have beheld its wondrous color changed to the crimson hue—the sure harbinger of coming death.

He saw not this.

He felt the mystic stone against his flesh, and was happy.

The cowering slave waited until his arrogant master had ceased his abuse, then, meekly folding his arms across his breast bowed his head, and said:

"Gracious lord, thy servant dare not disobey. He who now stands at thy gate—"

"Dare not, eh! By Allah! am I a dog, that every fool shall come to my house and swear he will see the cadi? Who is below, son of a burnt father?"

There was a malicious twinkle in the Nubian's eyes, as he slowly answered:

"The bearer of the bowstring!"

The jeweled pipe-stem fell from the cadi's lips. His hands clutched the cushions; his face became of a greenish hue, and falling back he moaned, in terror-stricken tones:

"The bearer of the bowstring!"

There was no hope for him now. Not all the fabulous wealth of the Indies could save him from strangulation.

Death had come upon him at a moment when his senses were steeped in bliss. The joys of the Moslem's paradise were faint in comparison to his happy state until the fearful, fatal, blighting words fell from the Nubian's lips—words that fell like a shadow of the tomb over the hapless possessor of the sea emerald—that mystic stone whose trail of blood would continue until the world should end, and all things should become chaos.

A few words of explanation is due to the readers of these pages—explanations of the hapless cadi's terror when the dread announcement fell from the Nubian's lips.

The bearer of the bowstring was the public executioner.

A dread being, whom the governor or the prime minister had at his command, one whose mission was never resisted. In his person was blended the sultan's power, and when a dignitary, either from a real or fancied crime, became obnoxious to the government, the executioner was sent to strangle the hapless wretch.

No questions were ever asked by the doomed. The fatal messenger had but to appear, and without a murmur, the cord would be wound around the neck of the victim.

The work over, the dread being went on his way, shunned, feared, yet unmolested. So great was the people's dread that they dared not, either by word or look, express their distaste for the wretch's power.

Such was the state of Turkey under the rule of the merciless potentates half a century since.

Civilization has done more of late years to alter this fearful state of things.

Without moving from that position in which he had fallen, the cadi awaited the coming of the executioner.

Had the wealth of the universe been offered him he could not have moved.

The terrible words had scorched him like a sheet of vivid lightning, and he lay helpless and motionless.

One thought alone came across his mind.

How, and in what manner, had he excited the displeasure of his superiors?

The question would never be solved in this world. Had the cadi displayed one thought upon the blood-bought jewel which lay next his heart, perhaps he would have known why the laws of the country came like the angel of death.

Clad from head to foot in spotless white, the messenger of death glided into the apartment.

The Nubian shivered as the softly-treading figure passed him, and crept cautiously from the chamber.

Without looking to the right or the left, the executioner went straight to his victim.

From beneath his white, flowing robe he took the fatal cord, and passed it around his neck.

The cadi gave a low cry as he felt the cord tighten.

That cry was his last.

The judicial murderer placed one knee upon the cadi's quivering chest, then united all the power of his brute strength to tighten the noose.

Was it only chance that the wretch's knee should press upon the fatal gem, or but a working out of its mystic destiny?

As the life was crushed out from the cadi's body, he felt the blood-stained treasure breaking through his skin, and adding an additional pang to his last moment.

The dread scene was soon over, and the man who but a few minutes before had imagined he had attained the zenith of his wishes, lay a hideous, ghastly, huddled heap of stiffening flesh upon the very divan where he had so often sentenced poor trembling wretches to be bastinadoed.

When the last convulsive throes told the practiced dispenser of death that the cadi was no more, he loosened the bowstring and arose from his kneeling posture, and awaited the coming of an officer who had accompanied him upon his ghastly errand.

This functionary's duties consisted in proving that the execution had taken place, and from long practice he knew the precise moment when to enter the chamber.

He came in as the executioner stepped back from the dead body, and looked at the cadi's distorted, horrible face.

He saw that life had quitted the senseless clay, and walking to the gong, which hung from the ceiling, gave the brazen drum three distinct blows with the butt of his pistol.

This was the signal for the slain official's servants to assemble and hear the mandates of the sultan.

The household, with Usof at their head, came trembling and silent in obedience to the well-known and dreaded summons.

One and all as they entered cast a startled, fearful look towards their late master, then fell back awed by the terrible frown of the sultan's messenger.

The officer held a small square of parchment in his hand, and, when the servants were all present, he read in a slow, audible voice the cause for which the late magistrate had suffered death.

"There is but one Allah," he read, "and our sovereign lord is his favorite on earth. May his shadow never grow less."

The awed listeners bent in lowly, reverential homage, and responded:

"May his shadow never grow less."

"Your master," the officer resumed, "is now dead. Look upon him and be warned. He broke the trust our gracious Sultan placed in him, and he has been punished; such is the justice of the glorious Light of the Universe, our gracious Sultan. Speak, is it justice?"

As though fearful of hearing their own voices, the servants responded:

"It is just; he deserved his fate. May Allah be merciful to him."

"Usof," said the messenger; "where is he called Usof?" Usof stepped forward.

"I am he," he cried; "what would my gracious master with his slave?"

Though he spoke calmly, the wily Usof knew the honor that awaited him.

The cadi's words were fulfilled, but not as he had anticipated.

The Judas servant had betrayed his master to the plotting seraskeer, and the latter had given him the honor he promised as a reward for his treachery.

The officer then read the Sultan's order which appointed Usof in his master's place, and even as the cold form lay huddled upon the cushions, Usof took his seat and received the homage of his late companions.

The officer's mission was accomplished, and he left, accompanied by the gaunt form of the executioner.

When Usof was alone, he detached the leathern bag, which held the mystic treasure, from the dead man's neck.

"It has worked out the prophecy of its finder," thought Usof. "Allah be praised. I am well rewarded by its aid, and covet not its possession."

The seraskeer's plot had prospered well.

The governor's cupidity was excited by the seraskeer's story of the wondrous emerald, and,

with Esop's aid, they soon found a mode of bringing a charge against the cadi.

The charge was laid before the vizier, and by him to the sultan, and the result was the departure of the bearer of the bow-string.

A swift messenger, while the body of the cadi was yet warm, spurred onward with the sea-emerald to the governor of the province.

"Allah is Great!" said Ratchet Bey, the seraskeer, as he beheld the messenger bearing away the treasure of the deep. "The first step is taken. Now, oh, governor, is thy turn!"

* * * * *

Ali Serap, the governor of the province, sat in his harem, surrounded by a bevy of beautiful women.

They were black-eyed beauties from the isles of Greece, whose Juno-like forms would have tempted the good Saint Anthony to sin had he been there.

Fair Circassians, delicate and graceful as fawns, sought to gain a smile from their master.

Reclining upon divans, where golden embroidery shone beneath the blaze of twenty pensile silvery lamps, were a number of Turkish women, who vied with their companions in driving Ali Serap from his melancholy.

To all their smiles and blandishments the Pasha took no notice, and might have been a statue for all the impression their soft, seductive wiles made upon him.

The great man was ill at ease.

Two long hours had passed since the time he had expected his messenger to return with the sea's mystic treasure.

Twenty times the thought crossed his mind that the cadi had fled with the wondrous emerald.

And, as the hours wore on, the Pasha could have torn his beard with anger and suspense.

A fair Georgian, whose pensive eyes at other times fired the Pasha's soul, timidly approached her lord.

"My lord," she murmured, "is angered with me to-day; shall I tune my lute to please him?"

The Pasha turned and roared:

"To the — with thy lute; the curse of Allah fall upon the whole of them."

The girl shrank back, a frightened scream escaping her lips.

This seemed the culminating-point of Ali Serap's misery.

One of his slaves to scream when his mind was ill at ease, threw him into such a towering passion, that the vituperative abuse that here followed nearly choked him.

He could not speak for passion; his favorite Sultana, seeing her lord black in the face, ran forward to give him aid.

The whole troop followed her example, and while every nerve was strained listening for the sound of the horse's hoof that announced his messenger, a dozen little hands were patting him on the back.

As he could not speak, the Pasha could raise his hands, and good use he made of them.

Striking out right and left, he floored seven of his tormentors, then yelling out a volley of curses, he rushed from the harem, leaving the frightened fair ones to condole with each other.

This tyrannical old sinner had once a narrow escape of his life.

He had ordered the bowstring to be sent out for the especial benefit of a certain young officer, when one of the ladies at his feet turned ghastly pale, and falling on her knees, pleaded that the young man's life might be saved.

Ali Serap, foaming with rage, struck the unhappy girl, when she sprang to her feet, and drawing a gleaming dagger from her girdle, rushed at the tyrant.

It would have gone hard with him, for in another moment the knife would have been in his heart, but a Nubian slave caught the enraged girl's wrist and held her fast.

The officer was killed by the bowstring, and the girl was sewn in a sack and flung that night into the river.

Stalking savagely down the vaulted passage that led from the women's apartments, he reached the audience chamber.

Here an unhappy slave had fallen asleep upon one of the divans.

The Pasha could have howled with delight. Here was something, at least, to vent his spleen upon—something to atone for the mauling he had received in the harem.

Rushing from the chamber, the Pasha called for his guards.

A dozen grim Moslems came rushing towards him.

"There—there!" he cried. "Behold the son of a jackass! Take him up—take him up! Does he dare sleep in the face of Ali Serap, protector and governor? Bastinado him; bastinado the bound!"

The unhappy sleeper awoke in the hands of the palace guards.

And before he well knew what had happened, he was thrown upon the ground, and the soles of his feet warmed with a smart application of a bamboo rod.

The poor slave's howl of agony was music to Ali Serap, and running about the chamber like a madman, he yelled:

"Harder—harder! by my soul, I'll have you all bastinadoed—every one. The curse of Allah be upon you all!"

The culprit roared louder at every fresh stroke of the bamboo.

Suddenly Ali's hand was held up, and he cried: "Stop—stop! It is—it is!"

To the amazement of his guards, he ran from the chamber, repeating:

"It is—it is!"

The welcome clatter of horses' hoof, ringing upon the paved courtyard, saved the unfortunate slave's feet from being skinned.

The Pasha could, in the fullness of his joy, have hugged the dust-covered messenger.

He forgot his previous anxiety as the man handed him a small packet and a letter from the seraskeer.

The letter he placed in his girdle, and readjusting the packet, walked quickly back to the audience-chamber.

The effulgent rays of the vertical sun streamed through a large window as he viewed the priceless gem.

Much as he had been prepared for the splendor of the mystic emerald, he could not repress a cry of admiration as the sun's rays fell upon the sparkling gem.

A million flashes of glittering light played over the lustrous jewel, and the Pasha, putting it back in its leather case, passed the thong around his neck.

Seid Ali Serap, think of the last neck that thong had entwined! Had the thought come to his brain, he would, perhaps, have been less exuberant in his joy.

Around the very spot where that thong had been wont to rest when the gem was in the cadi's possession, the blue mark left by the bowstring formed a deep indentation.

"A true friend thou art, O Ratchet Bey," said the Pasha. "Such a gift as this is worth a dozen cadis—a dozen, ay, a thousand."

He pressed the precious but fatal gift to his lips, then opened the wily seraskeer's letter.

Divesting the epistle of its flowery terms, it ran thus:

"This wondrous jewel, my friend, was taken by an infidel from the depths of the ocean. It has rare and curious properties. Watch it well, and should harm threaten thee, its color will change, and give thee warning. May thy shadow never grow less, and thy possession of the sea-emerald never bring thee harm."

"A generous friend at last; Allah be praised!" muttered the Pasha, as he folded the letter.

"Well shalt thou be rewarded, oh seraskeer; our bounty shall be great for thy kindness."

The cunning in the old fellow's eyes belied his words.

Ali Serap now possessed the jewel, and his brain was busy finding a mode by which he could rid himself of the seraskeer.

He felt that none should possess the secret of its existence, and at once commenced planning the seraskeer's destruction.

Three days passed before he could find a safe method of repaying his good friend.

Then he sent a messenger to the grand vizier, impeaching the seraskeer's loyalty.

Quick as he had been, the old seraskeer was before him, and, at the time his messenger arrived, the vizier was racking his brain to find an excuse for getting rid of the Pasha.

The seraskeer had sent a detailed and glowing account of the jewel, and the vizier, longing to possess the wonderful stone, could scarcely brook an instant's delay.

The Pasha's destruction was at once resolved upon.

But how was it to be effected?

The visit of Ali Serap's messenger solved the question, and with the latter's report against the seraskeer, the vizier sought an audience with the Sultan.

The effeminate monarch left the government of his kingdom to his vizier, and when he heard the cunning lies with which the Pasha sought to belie the faithful old general, his answer was:

"Send the bow-string to the dog, and make Ratchet Bey governor in his stead."

The vizier's heart leaped for joy. He should have the gem, and the seraskeer the post he coveted.

When Ali Serap was in hourly expectation of his messenger's return, he was appalled by the

sudden appearance of the bearer of the bow-string and his attendant officer.

The trembling Pasha's guilty mind recalled a hundred crimes which he had committed; each one, he knew, was punishable by death.

Which particular crime had been discovered, and brought his doom, he endeavored to learn, but his inquiries were cut short by the tightening of the cord.

The scene that took place was a repetition of the cadi's death; but this time the slain cadi was represented by the seraskeer.

Thus had the fearful gem brought death upon five of its possessors, and yet in its onward course two men had been benefited.

True, neither had coveted the mystic, fearful stone, and the words of part of the legend were being carried out.

"Those who covet me not shall be rewarded; those who possess me shall die!"

* * * * *

Plunging forward like a maddened steed, a small vessel was striving to ride out the fearful storm.

Such a storm! One of those sudden changes from bright, glorious sunshine and cerulean clouds to fierce, howling winds, and Heaven's canopy, like a thick, murky fog, hanging over the ocean.

Here and there, as the storm clouds were lifted by a sudden gust of wind, light-blue glimpses of the hidden day would appear.

And when the storm-clouds closed the gap, a somber hue fell upon the troubled face of the great watery world.

The storm had burst so suddenly upon the affrighted seamen that they had not time to take in a single reef of their flowing canvas before the vessel swung around and dashed onward like a stricken steed.

Afar could be heard the dull roar of the surge as it broke upon the rocky shore.

A storm so portentous of evil to the cowering crew, that they bent their heads to the deck, and prayed to their Deity for help.

It was an Eastern bark, of light construction, and manned by a crew of Moslems.

They heard not the wild shrieks of their captain, as he called on them—some to take helm, and others to let fall the sails that were hurrying them to destruction.

It was their fate, they thought, to be cast upon the rapidly nearing breakers, and human agency could not save them.

Their last hours must be devoted to supplications to Allah and his prophet.

Aiding the captain, by fierce and frantic promises of fabulous wealth, was a tall, big-bearded Moslem.

His dress was such as worn only by the highest and most favored in the East.

He promised them wealth in abundance—gold that would enable them to create a paradise on earth, but his words fell unheeded.

It was their kismet (fate), and none but Allah could help them now.

So the captain and richly-dressed Pagan seized the wheel, and sought, by their heavy weight, to jam it down.

When their hands grasped the spokes, a mighty wave came leaping over the vessel's stern. The wheel was wrenched from their grasp and the two feeble men were hurled against the vessel's side.

One fell to rise no more.

It was the captain. His skull came in contact with an iron bolt, and he died where he fell.

Then on—on through the heaving billows, went the light craft; on—until the dull roar of the breakers sent a chill of their coming doom to the abject crew.

Suddenly the vessel stopped, and quivered as though a shudder was passing through her timbers.

Then the huge waves leaped around her—there was a stifled shriek—a long, despairing cry—and where, a moment before, a ship stood, reeling to and fro, nothing was left but a confused medley of spars, sails, and struggling seamen.

Then the waves, as though rejoicing at the fell havoc, rose higher, and all that were left of the crew were hurled against the jagged reef, and crushed into indistinguishable shapes.

But one of those who had trod the deck of the storm-riven vessel reached the shore alive.

He, only with the energy that desperation alone can give, clung to a spar—then, torn and bleeding, was cast out of the reach of the angry waves.

When the new-born joy arose in his breast of renewed life, the castaway struggled to his feet, and staggered towards a clump of dark-jutting trees.

Here he paused for a moment, and taking a small, dark-looking object from his breast, muttered:

"All is gone—save this. Allah, be praised—Allah be praised!"

The speaker held in his grasp the sea-emerald—that fatal jewel which carried death to all who held it.

Yes, he alone escaped the fearful wreck.

Death by drowning was too easy for those who possessed the precious gem.

The mystic ritual of blood must fall upon its possessor.

Now, torn, bleeding and weary was the Grand Vizier to the Sultan of the great and powerful Ottoman empire!

The man who had become possessed of the sea-treasure and its curse.

From the time the leathern bag had first been placed upon his neck, peace and happiness had fled from his mind. In daily, hourly fear of losing the inestimable gem, his life became a living torture.

There was little of the crafty statesman left in his failing brain.

All his thoughts became centered in this one, this fatal object.

And one morning his royal master missed his great minister.

He had gone, none knew whither; left during the night, so stealthily that none could give a clue of his whereabouts.

The ship which had just been shattered upon the sunken reef was chartered by the vizier to bear him to a secluded spot, where, alone, he could exist in the enjoyment of his wealth.

In the haunts of his fellow men he felt his life was not worth an hour's purchase.

But the storm had turned his cherishing hope, and he was now alone, and panting for food, upon a strange and uninhabited shore.

The full horror of his position burst upon him when he regarded the mystic treasure; he burst into tears, and staggering a few paces forward, fell to the earth prone and powerless.

The glad sunshine came again, while the stricken man lay in his death-like torpor; and, as the first ray shot upon the earth, a figure, wild-looking and attenuated, came out from the thick under-wood.

He beheld the fallen form of the wretched vizier, and a cry of surprise fell from his lips.

A cry that was turned to joy, when, in placing his hand inside the vizier's robe to feel if life yet beat within his breast, his fingers touched the bag containing the sea-emerald.

The wild denizen of that strange land paused in his act of mercy to examine the contents of that strangely fashioned case.

Then, as the glittering fire from the dire jewel came before his eyes, a grim and demoniacal expression came over his pale, thin face.

"He must die," he muttered. "Were ten lives in the way, I would take them all to possess this."

He raised a huge, jagged piece of rock, and poised it for a second above the vizier's head.

It fell with a dull, sickening crash; the vizier gave one convulsive shudder, and his spirit fled.

Another had gone—another had paid the forfeit of the sea-emerald's possession.

Then the madman, with a greedy look in his swollen eyes, left the stiffening form, and sat upon the trunk of a fallen tree.

In his hand he held the fatal gem, and like a demon, he exulted over its possession.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BOARDING THE SPECTER SHIP.

ALL Constantinople rang with the murders of so many influential men from Imaun Bey upwards, and Captain Tom's secret inquiries soon proved to him that they were caused by the curse of the Sea Emerald.

His disappointment was great. What could he do? Only one thing.

Leave one of his trusted and most intelligent followers to trace the stone if possible, and then he could return to wrest it from its unlawful possessor.

That done, the *Will-o'-the-Wisp's* white sails were spread to the breeze, and in a brief time she was far away from the Crescent City on her mission of retribution.

Captain Tom had registered a vow to destroy the death pirate, and how little likely he was to break that vow.

He stood now conversing with Ben Barnacle. They had received valuable information and were discussing it now.

"What tack did the corvette sail on, Ben?"

"She has gone westward. We can but follow. In an hour the wind will be in our favor, and unless the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* has gone to the bottom, we shall overhaul the corvette before morning."

Ben Barnacle's prophecy proved correct. Within the hour the wind had risen, and the swift

vessel, under a press of sail, swept through the waters.

Zelie, the corsair maiden, stood by the young chief's side, and as her dark, swimming eyes were fixed with mournful sadness upon his face, she asked, plaintively:

"Your vessel cuts the water like an arrow. Are you again upon the eve of danger?"

Captain Tom laughed at her fears.

"Danger, Zelie?" he said. "When did Captain Tom evade peril?"

"Alas!" she replied, "never. The fire and smoke of battle seem your natural element."

"It is, Zelie. Without the clash of foemen's steel, and the roar of guns, life would be but a sorry burden to bear."

He looked so grand, so noble, as he spoke, that the young maiden for a time forgot her fears for the young hero.

"I ought," she said, "did I love you less, to worship you as one too noble for one so humble as myself to claim a thought; but my fear for your safety in these terrible encounters makes me tremble with dread."

He took her hand kindly.

"Zelie," he said, "one and all of us have our fate marked out from the beginning. Mine is to come like a shadow on the evil doer, and wreak a fitting vengeance for their crimes."

She looked at him interrogatively.

"You do not understand me, Zelie?"

"I do not."

"Have you," he asked, "ever heard of the Shadow Avengers?"

Zelie started.

"I have," she said, "but the story is so full of strangeness, that I cannot credit such beings' existence."

"Why?"

"The mystery of their sudden appearance. Do they not rise from the depths of the sea?"

"Such is the story."

"Is it not true, then?"

"No; the Avengers and the Specter Ship are as substantial as my crew and the vessel upon which you stand."

Zelie cast a quick look, and said:

"Are you speaking the truth?"

"I am, Zelie. Nay, more; you shall yet behold the Avenging Band and their mystic vessel."

To the mind of the Eastern girl, a mind filled with strangely-formed fancies, the idea of the supernatural has every comprehension.

"You," she said, anxiously, "will not meet this dread ship?"

"I shall not," said Captain Tom, smiling; "for I am the chief of the terrible league, and this is the Specter Ship of the Sea."

Zelie uttered a quick cry, and recoiled from the young chief.

"Be not alarmed," he said; "the strange, weird character of the Sea Avengers has been sustained without the help of magic."

"But—but—" she began, "can you bid the vessel go beneath the waves, and appear beside a foe?"

"Not to such an extent does my power extend," he said. "Be not alarmed, Zelie; it is but a clever application of mechanism which causes the sudden appearance of—"

"Sail ho!"

Captain Tom took the glass from the deck, and asked the lookout the direction of the vessel.

"On the larboard quarter, sir."

"Can you make her out?"

"Partly, sir; it is a man-of-war."

"The *Lapwing*," thought Captain Tom, as he leveled his glass. "If so, all will be well."

When the vessels came within hail, the stranger turned out to be the frigate commanded by the old commodore.

He acknowledged the young buccaneer's salute, and went on his way without one word to Captain Tom Drake.

Truth to tell, the old seaman's mind was too much bowed down by the sudden grief which had fallen upon him to be very communicative.

The day mingled with night, and the night gave place to another day, before the man at the masthead gave the welcome signal that a sail was in sight.

Impelled by a strange feeling, Captain Tom ascended the mainmast, and placing his glass to bear upon the stranger, he took a long and careful survey.

It was not the *Lapwing*; but to judge from the expression upon Captain Tom's handsome face, it was evident that the coming vessel was known to him.

"Ready, there, below!" he suddenly shouted. "The Specter Ship is upon her path of vengeance."

His strange words were well understood by those on deck, and in less time than the words can be written, the white pyramid of sail fell from the hull, and the ship's yards to the deck.

She was under bare poles.

And another word from the young leader, a strange rolling noise came from beneath the vessel—a noise that resembled hidden machinery being set in motion.

Then from the open hatches there arose a white vapor, which, instead of being thrown away as it ascended, clung to the vessel's hull and spars, and gave her the appearance of a white cloud floating on the waters.

Though thus deprived of her sails, the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* continued her onward course.

Captain Tom's words were fulfilled.

The Specter Ship of the Sea was upon her path of vengeance.

While the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* crept, unseen, towards the strange vessel, Captain Tom Drake, from the masthead, beheld a sight which sent the hot blood from his cheeks, and caused every fiber in his brain to thrill with excitement.

Ben Barnacle, who stood with folded arms at the foot of the mainmast, watched the varying hues of his young leader's face.

"Something," he thought, "of more than ordinary import is going forward upon that vessel."

Suddenly a cry of rage fell from the young buccaneer's lips, and dashing the glass to the deck, he glided down the rope, and stood beside Ben Barnacle.

"You are strangely morose," said Ben. "What has happened?"

"Enough, Ben," said the buccaneer leader, "to pierce a stronger brain than mine."

"Its nature?"

"The vessel," said Captain Tom, "that we are gliding invisibly towards, is that of the *Death Pirate*."

Ben Barnacle uttered a short cry, and his dark eyes shone with fury.

"The fiend," he hissed through his clenched teeth, "who under that ghastly mask hides his face from the world—curse him! There will yet come the time when I shall rend that covering from his face, and—"

Captain Tom had never beheld Ben's features so expressive as they were in this instance.

"Ben," he said, interrupting his companion, "you know this fellow?"

"I do. Did you know how much of that ruffian's early career has blended with your path—but—I—"

"Go on, Ben."

"Some other time—I have said too much already."

"You have not; you spoke of my father. Tell me, do you know him?"

There was a strange quivering motion perceptible upon Ben's lips as he answered hastily:

"I did."

Captain Tom's heart beat strangely as he gazed into the speaker's dark eyes.

"Ben," he said, "you are not what you seemed when you were brought upon the roaming ship by the press-gang."

"Another time," said Ben Barnacle hastily, "you shall know all. Do not ask any more questions now, but tell me what you beheld on the deck of that vessel!"

There was such an entreaty in the voice that uttered these words that Captain Tom Drake, much as he wished to learn the strange history of his father, was compelled to refrain for the present.

"Be it so," he said; "but remember, when this engagement is over, I must learn the mystery that surrounded my early days."

"You shall, at a fitting time, know all," said Ben Barnacle. "Should I fall, there is a packet in my breast that is for you. It—"

"For me?"

"Then you will learn the cause of your—Ha, what is that? A woman's voice in distress!"

"It is a woman."

"A woman?" said Ben, in astonishment, "and on board that vessel?"

"She is there."

"For mercy sake drive the ship on faster; we may be too late to save them!"

"We are moving as quickly as the strong wind that is full against us will permit. Behold, we are within musket shot."

Peering through the white cloud of vapor, Ben Barnacle beheld the huge hull of the pirate ship close upon them.

At the moment his eyes discerned the deck of the pirate ship the inhuman wretch was calmly standing by watching his myrmidons torturing some women.

Ben Barnacle gnashed his teeth with rage, and his dark face became convulsed with the terrible conflict of harrowing feelings in his heart.

"Fierce monster!" he shouted, as his hand sought the hilt of a heavy blade that hung by his side, "all the devils in Satan's gang shall not save you from my hands when we meet!"

A hand was placed upon the angry seaman's

shoulder; he turned, and beheld Captain Tom Drake.

The gallant boy, though appalled at the horrible brutality taking place on the pirate's deck, was singularly calm.

"When I have crossed blades with the devil in human form," he said, with great quietude, "it will be time for you, Ben Barnacle, to take your weapon in your hand."

Ben's brow became as black as night, and in his sudden anger he uttered words that he would have given worlds to have recalled.

"My quarrel," he said, angrily, "dates from a time before you came into the world, therefore I have a prior right in this matter."

An angry flush came to Captain Tom Drake's handsome face.

"I am master here," he said, proudly, "and all who serve under my flag must obey. I tell you that my hand, and no other, shall punish this miscreant."

Ben Barnacle stamped his foot upon the deck as he said, passionately:

"Boy, you know not to whom you speak!"

"I do," was the quiet reply; "I speak to Ben Barnacle, a man in whom, it appears, I have placed too much trust; one, of all others, who should be the last to use mutinous language to Captain Tom."

The angry young chief turned away from Ben, and placed himself in front of a number of gallant lads, who, with drawn weapons, were awaiting the moment to throw themselves upon the pirate's deck.

Ben looked after the latter's graceful form as he muttered:

"This is fearful to endure; it wants but another scene like this, and I shall be compelled to proclaim myself, and be master here."

Strange and mystic words were these for Captain Tom's followers to hear, and Ben Barnacle was a man that never made an idle boast or threat against the true leader of the brave spirits who thronged the decks of the splendid ship.

It was a position that a prince might give his birthright to attain.

Yet this man, a subordinate officer under the fiery young captain's command, talked of leading on the terrible band.

Unless some dark secret lay beneath the usually calm demeanor of Ben Barnacle, his words were but the effect of sudden passion. Time will solve the truth, and raise the supposed obscure seaman to the position for which his kingly mien and bright intellect so eminently suited him.

In grim silence, and enveloped by the mystic cloud of invisibility, the Death Avengers rushed upon their foes.

Like an avalanche, the gallant lads swept the broad decks of the pirate ship—thrusting their bright steel in the pirates' bodies, and driving the fear-stricken crew like a herd of sheep towards the fore part of their huge vessel.

Foremost in the death struggle could be seen the splendid form of the gallant young captain; and close beside him was Ben Barnacle, his dark eyes watching for every blade that was leveled at the fearless boy's heart.

Like an Apollo of old, Ben Barnacle swept down all before him, his strong arm wielding a curved cimenter, and ere the fray was scarce begun it ran with blood from point to hilt.

Mighty were the efforts made by Captain Tom Drake and Ben Barnacle to reach the steel-clad form of the Death Pirate.

Efforts that were for a time unavailing.

The grim leader of the pirate horde rallied his band, and led them onward to repel the daring attack of Captain Tom's gallant crew.

Wielding his cimenter high in the air, he shouted: "Follow me, pirates of death—hurl back those striplings into the sea—were they demons we could outnumber them. Follow—follow!"

Animated by the tone and example of their mystic leader, the corsairs bore down in overwhelming numbers upon the small band of heroes.

There was a short but sickening scene of strife. The middies fought and fell without yielding one inch of vantage ground.

Returned stab for stab and shot for shot with a silent attention that showed their foes there would be no victory unless the second band of English boys were decimated.

Now, amid the dreadful strife, did Ben Barnacle and his young leader perform such prodigies of valor that the fierce-headed foemen who fell beneath their mighty arms formed a rampart of quivering flesh before the gallant pair.

Captain Tom, though so fiercely engaged with the terrible odds before him, watched with eagle eye every movement of the pirate gang.

Four young midshipmen, who acted as his aides-de-camp, stood within ear-shot, and to them he from time to time gave his orders for the disposition of his forces.

He saw with mingled feelings of bitterness and pain that the enemy's best marksmen, who filled the tops, were pouring down a shower of bullets from their long matchlocks upon his brave, unyielding boys.

Others, he saw, were crowding the open hatches, and with their long-barreled weapons were taking sure and deliberate aim at his crew.

"Go," he said, to one of the middies, "and lead a party to the quarter-deck—tell them to pick off their enemies on top."

The boy hastened to obey the order, a proud smile upon his lips at the honor thus bestowed upon him.

He had not taken more than three paces from his leader, when a ball from one of the very men he was sent to dislodge, cleft his ear in twain.

He fell at our hero's feet, the proud smile still upon his lips.

A smothered cry of rage came from Captain Tom's lips at the sight, and his handsome face became convulsed with passion.

"That ball," he said, "was intended for me; keep them in check here, Ben. I'll go myself and dislodge those fiends."

He cut his way through the savage horde, and leaving a trail of blood in his path, reached the quarter-deck.

"Quick!" he said to those who followed him, "hand me a rifle. Now to make them clear the tops."

With a deadly, unerring aim he began the work. At every flash of his rifle a turbaned pirate came whirling through the air, stricken to death by the angry youth.

As long as there remained a foe along the rigging did the gallant young captain and his companions keep up a stream of fire, and when the pirates' life-stream ran along the masts, and fell drop by drop upon the hands and faces of the gallant crew below, a terrible cry from Ben Barnacle caused our hero to hurl his rifle into the sea and spring with one bound from the quarter-deck.

The cause of Ben's sudden cry and our hero's swift movement, was as unexpected as it was terrible.

Ben and the Death Pirate had met.

Captain Tom paused unhesitatingly at the two crossed blades; he saw the hate that gleamed in Ben's dark eyes, and heard the strange words that fell from his lips as his weapon clashed upon that of the Death Pirate.

"So," said Ben, "we have met at last, Henri—oh, heavens!"

His falchion shivered to the hilt as he dealt a powerful stroke at the Death Pirate's head.

The heavy blade fell upon the miscreant's steel corslet, rebounded, and broke like a reed.

The next moment Captain Tom beheld Ben's kingly form stretched prone upon the deck, and heard the Death Pirate's mocking laugh of triumph.

Then the youth, with eyes ablaze with passion, strode forward, and faced the hideous monster, who, raising his cimenter, rushed forward and shrieked:

"Now for the cub, the wolf is gone."

"Leveling a pistol straight at the Death Pirate's head, the brave youth said:

"Thus will I avenge his fall!"

He pulled the trigger."

Horror! the treacherous pistol flashed in the pan.

Then the Death Pirate, with a yell of joy, sprang towards his young antagonist to cut him to the deck.

But as his flashing blade descended it was caught by the Damascus blade wielded by Captain Tom.

The hideous pirate foamed at the mouth with rage.

Every feint, every cut, every slash he made was met by the splendid swordsmanship of the graceful youth.

Had the pirate not been defended by entire steel mail, Tom's sword would have passed through and through his body.

Nerved by the fate of Ben Barnacle, the young leader, with matchless skill, probed the pirate through the interstices of his corslet.

The Death Pirate yelled with baffled rage to be thus slowly slain, and attacked him like an angry panther.

In vain he sought to crush down his guard. His blade was turned aside, and before he could recover it Tom's keen point had found an entry to his flank, and he felt a stream of fresh, strong blood ooze out between his armor.

Captain Tom marked his baffled rage, and with lightning swiftness caused the angry monster to yell with pain.

"My blade is good," he would say, when he made a terrible lunge. "Ha! there is ample place for its point to enter. You felt that."

"Hell's lad—devil's imp!" yelled the pirate, "thus do I—"

"And thus," said Tom, driving his sword point in the pirate's shoulder as far as the small space between the steel plates would permit, "do I bleed you little by little until your strength fails you—then," added Tom, smilingly, "I'll tear that mask off, saw the head from your body, and place it on the mast-head for vultures to feed upon."

The Death Pirate began to feel himself getting weaker, and a foreboding that his brave, skillful, lithe adversary's words would come to pass came to his mind.

There was but one course open to the ghastly monster unless he could quickly end this contest—call for assistance.

Foiled at every point, his gigantic power broken by the Death Avengers, and his life-blood ebbing away in spite of his steel panoply—no wonder that the miscreant fell back, and sought to evade the avenging blade of the young buccaneer.

Step by step Captain Tom followed, and had not the pirate gang, in a moment of frenzy, broke away from the little band of resolute boys, the Death Pirate's hour would have come.

In this mad flight, the surging crowd separated our hero and his steel-clad foe, and, calling upon Allah for aid, they rushed to the quarter-deck, followed by the middies, shouting:

"Hurrah—hurrah! Victory! They fly—they fly! Hurrah!"

A gesture from Captain Tom stayed the pursuit.

"They are beaten," he said; "let there be no unnecessary bloodshed. Gather your dead and wounded, and let the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* appear."

Every word and look of their leader was law to the brave band, and, flushed as they were with their great victory, they without a murmur began to collect the fallen forms of their companions.

As they bore them to the side, the white cloud which had enveloped the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* rolled away, and the stately vessel's beautiful outlines stood out in bold relief against the blue sky.

As the vapor rolled upward, the grinning, expectant faces of Doctor Shrike and his factotum, Jacop, could be seen waiting for their subjects.

The Death Pirate stood motionless on the spot where his flying crew had deserted him.

Through the holes in his ghastly mask his eyes could be seen glaring with a fierce, maniacal stare.

The wish was strong within his heart to spring upon his gallant young foe, but he felt that the first movement of his hands or feet would be the signal for Captain Tom's sword to finish the work he had so well begun.

When the young buccaneers had removed their dead and wounded companions to their own vessel, they drew up in two lines at a respectful distance from their young chief.

Captain Tom waved them back, and addressed the leader of the Moorish corsair.

"Pirate," he said, "if the blood of your miscreant crew has flowed to-day, and the barbarity with which you inflicted such torture upon the helpless maiden who fell into your paws has been atoned for, I will not slay you, though by so doing I should rid the world of a monster whose very breath pollutes the air that streams in sunny wafts to every living thing—take the remnant of your breath. Keep your vessel, and learn from this act to be more merciful. Beware! night and day the shadow stranger will be near you, and you would get less mercy from the forest king than from Captain Tom."

With bowed head, and seeming contrition of spirit, the Death Pirate listened to the young chieftain's words, and when he had concluded, the pirate held his sword by the point, and offered the hilt to his conqueror.

Captain Tom Drake pushed the weapon aside with his hand.

"Take it, noble youth," said the Death Pirate; "you have, by your valor, broken a band of men that I deemed invincible. I have nothing now to live for."

He broke the blade of his cimenter upon the bulwarks, and tossed the pieces from him.

"I have but one wish now," he said; "will you grant it?"

Captain Tom Drake looked the surprise he felt.

"It is, perhaps, a strange one," said the Death Pirate. "Give me a passage to the nearest port we meet, and my name shall disappear with me forever."

"Are you sincere?"

"I am, by the sa—"

"Do not profane the name of the Deity which you have so often outraged by calling Him to witness your oath. You shall have the boon you ask; but, remember, if you intend treachery, far better had you cast yourself into a burning cauldron of oil than ventured on board the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*. And on that vessel every action known to you will be watched and rewarded, and the faintest suspicion of your sincerity will be the

signal for a death so horrible that, refined in cruelty as you are, the bare mention of it will make you shudder.

"I will take the risk."

"Be it so. As a proof of your sincerity, begin by unmasking your face."

The Death Prince started.

"Not here," he said. "Alone with you the wish shall be gratified; here I would sooner die than unmask."

Captain Tom reflected for some moments.

"It shall be as you wish," he said. "Are you ready to come on board?"

"Before you have cast off the grappling-irons I will follow. I wish to tell those who have served me so long and faithfully of my intentions."

Had Ben Barnacle been by our hero's side, he would have warned his leader of the danger he incurred; but poor Ben was at that moment under the treatment of Dr. Shrike and his assistant, Jacop, the Maory.

The young buccaneer went back to his ship, Captain Tom and Minnie closely following them. And the Death Pirate, striding towards the point where his desperate crew were huddled, addressed them in a sharp, savage tone.

"Desperadoes," he said, "man the lower-deck guns to bear upon the spars of that infernal vessel when I give the word to fire; I am going on board. It may cripple her so that she can't follow us. Ha-ha-ha! I'll whine like a beaten cur to this brat, until I—"

"We are casting off," sang out Captain Tom.

"Quick! or the vessels will be parted."

The Death Pirate, with bowed head, walked to the side and clambered over the bulwarks. The next moment he stood upon the side of the ship.

He stood for a moment as though sorrowfully contemplating his vessel as the Moors were busy shaking out the sails.

Then, with a sudden bound, he sprang past Captain Tom Drake, and swinging Minnie in his powerful grasp, he sprang upon the bulwarks, and from them to his own ship.

"Fire!" he yelled, as his feet touched the planks. "Fire!"

The iron storm tore through the lower rigging of the buccaneer's vessel—crashing through the spars, and tearing the white sails into ribbons; and in a moment the graceful ship was rendered useless to pursue the *San Josef*, which shot quickly ahead of her crippled adversary.

With such swiftness had this daring act taken place, that the buccaneers were not aware of what had happened until their vessel reeled like a stricken steed under the concentrated fire of the *San Josef's* heavy guns.

Dashing through the thick white smoke, Captain Tom Drake, sword in hand, followed the daring abductor of his love.

He reached the pirate vessel a moment after the wily villain had given the order to fire.

With a cry of rage he sprang to where the Death Pirate stood, his sword upraised to cleave him to the deck.

The weapon cleft the air, and as the mocking voice of his subtle foe rang out with devilish glee, Captain Tom Drake beheld Minnie and her abductor sinking through the deck.

She was being taken to the *San Josef's* state-room by means of a trap-door, which worked by hidden machinery.

Captain Tom would have hurled himself after her, but the trap arose swiftly, and a number of his foes, armed with spears and yataghans, rushed from all parts of the vessel to slay the gallant boy.

He was alone upon the pirate ship, surrounded by his foes. Minnie in the room of this ruthless leader, and his own vessel disabled by the close broadside, was soon left far behind.

It was a moment of such dire peril, that brave as he was, he felt appalled.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IRON ARM.

At the moment when Captain Tom deemed death inevitable, a man of gigantic proportions rushed among the pirates.

"Back!" he cried.

"Iron Arm!" they exclaimed.

"Ay, and his protector!" and before they could divine his intentions, he had snatched our hero up in his herculean arms and leaped with him into the sea.

This daring act was seen from the *Will o' the Wisp*, and Ben at once ordered boats to be lowered.

When Captain Tom Drake and Iron Arm heard the shout which came from the buccaneers' lips, they knew, unless the pirate vessel put about, their danger would soon be over.

With scarcely any perceptible motion of the

arms, they supported their bodies upon the bosom of the deep.

Iron Arm conversed with his companion in a careless, happy strain, and as easy as though they had been seated in the state-room of a stout ship, rather than immersed up to their necks in water, and liable at any moment to have their lower limbs gnawed off by the teeth of the hungry monsters who infest the deep.

"So you think my sudden aid a strange proceeding?" said Iron Arm, replying to a question from Captain Tom. "You would think it stranger did you know me."

Captain Tom gazed earnestly at the handsome face before him.

"It seems," he said, "when you speak, as though your voice recalled some forgotten event in my life. Tell me, have we met before?"

Iron Arm smiled.

"We have," he said, "but it was when you were a curly-haired, ruddy-cheeked child."

"I thought so."

"Why?"

"The sound of your voice is familiar, and strikes upon my ears like the half-gotten tones of one I knew in childhood."

"You were too young at the time to know me, therefore do not seek to penetrate the mystery that caused my action of to-day."

"But," said the young captain, "your conduct is so inexplicable—one hour defending the very men that you struck down to save me, the next coming to my side when I—"

Iron Arm interrupted the speaker.

"There you are wrong," he said. "When your crew boarded the *San Josef*, I was a passive spectator of the fight."

Tom looked the astonishment he felt.

"You are a strange being," he said; "and to you I owe my life, and I would give much to know the cause of your sudden friendship."

"Not sudden, Captain Tom. From the first hour you have become famous I have been your friend. Your daring encounter with the pirates caused me to come many—many miles of sea and land to behold you. I came. I saw one that had more than a common interest to me."

"More than a common interest?"

"Yes. I departed as I came, unseen; and chance brought me in contact with that scoundrel who hides his face beneath that hideous mask?"

"The Death Pirate?"

"Yes, and from him I heard of his vengeful desire to slay you. It was enough. I agreed to serve under his banner, and waited for the time when I should be wanted."

"To save me!"

"Yes."

"May I ask you why you took this step?"

"My destiny bade me."

"Your destiny? I do not understand."

"When the time comes you will know all. But of this much I may tell you, that our lives are strangely interwoven, and there are many yet to thwart who seek your life."

Captain Tom, surprised at what he heard, remained for some time silent, during which time his mystic companion recapitulated many of the past events of our young hero's life.

He spoke of poor old Gregory, and his lips quivered.

He spoke of Tom's mother, and a vengeful gleam shone in his eyes.

"There is one," he said in conclusion, "who will yet work you evil, unless a watchful eye and sure hand thwarts his purpose."

"That one?"

"Reuben Harpy."

"Reuben Harpy, my cowardly, treacherous cousin, whose accursed villainy first drove me from the service?"

"Yes, Reuben Harpy. Disgraced for cowardice, and dismissed with ignominy from the navy, now, under another name, and claiming the protection of a foreign government, commands a vessel carrying the Brazilian flag."

"In their service?"

"No. A letter of marque from that government to enable him to attack defenseless merchantmen, and act the pirate, without incurring a pirate's risk of the law," Iron Arm added. "I would prefer yonder miscreant, from whose clutches we have just escaped, than the slimy, subtle, cowardly Reuben."

This unexpected intelligence somewhat astonished our hero.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "about the best thing among the many discoveries I make, is this. How, in the name of all that is wonderful, did he obtain a letter of marque?"

"Not by his bravery, you may be sure. His good friend, Sanderson, I believe, gave Reuben a false set of papers; thus he has been enabled to pass himself as an English officer of tried courage."

"But will they not discover the cheat?"

"Not yet; the base Reuben takes especial care to keep clear of the Chilian men-of-war; the capture of a rich trader now and then quite satisfies his Brazilian Majesty."

"I cannot see what I have to fear from him."

"Nothing by open hostility. Remember, the assassin's knife is a sure weapon."

Tom's eyes flashed.

"Would the cowardly dog dare?"

"He will, when the opportunity offers; brave as you are, and surrounded by those who would gladly die in your defense, I would not give an old copper coin for your life were any of his cut-throats put upon your trail."

Tom's lips curled with a smile of disdain.

"I would," he said, "crush the viper under my heel."

"Had you the viper there to crush. No, he will take care to keep out of your reach."

"I have faced the grim tyrant too often," said Tom, "to fear harm from the puny efforts of Reuben Harpy."

"Raise your feet," said Iron Arm. "Let us float on our backs until the boats arrive. We are not making much head against the wind."

The young chief acted upon the suggestion.

"You underrate your enemy," said Iron Arm, as they floated side by side. "I knew one," a dark shadow came over the speaker's face as he spoke, "who, like yourself, laughed at the cowardly poltroon, whose hate he had incurred."

"How?"

"Much the same cause as produces this feeling all over the world."

"A woman, I expect, by your cynical smile?"

"You are right—a woman." Iron Arm raised his head for a moment. "We have a few minutes yet to spare. Shall I tell you the story?"

"Do."

"I will be as brief as possible. When Reuben first went to the Brazils he became enamored of a dark-eyed beauty, the daughter of an old officer. She was affianced to a young naval lieutenant at the time, and gave Reuben but scant encouragement to his passion. Her betrothed not being near, your gallant cousin—pardon for naming the relationship—insulted the young girl, and soon after her lover returned. What think you he did?"

"Challenged the scoundrel, perhaps?"

"No; his hot southern blood could not wait for the preliminaries of a duel. He lashed the precious Reuben in a public square, spat in his face, then sent him a challenge."

"Which was not taken up?"

"No; the perfidious villain crept on board his ship, and by the aid of his ruffianly lieutenant, concocted such a fiendish plan of revenge that, even cold as I am now, my blood is on fire at the recollection."

"What was it?"

"There is not time to tell you the details; sufficient only to bring you to the climax. The pair were united, and they started upon a cruise in a small yacht belonging to the husband. Scarcely had the land faded from sight, when Reuben, who had been like a tiger waiting for his prey, bore down upon them. The fond young wife clung to her husband when she saw into whose hands she was likely to fall. 'Be brave,' he said, folding her to his heart; 'we can but die once—God help us!' Gold had bought Reuben's ruffianly crew to commit the atrocious deed, and like a swarm of devils, they boarded the hapless yacht. Her scanty crew were cut down in a few moments, and the bridal pair were tied back to back to the mast. I—I—can scarcely tell you. The vessel was fired by the cold-blooded miscreants."

"Surely they did not die?"

Captain Tom's frame trembled with excitement as he asked this question.

"They did," was the answer. "The cowardly villains stood by the blazing vessel until nothing remained but a blackened, smoldering line upon the waters."

The brave youth's voice quivered as he asked: "Has the deed not been avenged?"

His companion raised his powerful, muscular arm from the water, and said, fiercely:

"Not yet! Unless this hand loses its power, I will crush the life out of that craven carcass ere many suns have set."

"I will aid you," said the buccaneer. "My life, my ship, are at your service to avenge the death of that hapless pair."

Before Iron Arm could reply, the boats shot alongside, and they were taken on board.

A few words from the young leader explained the presence of the colored stranger, and he received a warm greeting from the crew.

There was but one who held aloof from him, and that one was Ben Barnacle.

He started when the huge form entered the boat, and his face became the hue of death.

"Can the grave," he muttered, "have given up its dead?"

The sight of Ben Barnacle sitting in the stern-

sheets of the cutter had a strange effect upon the mystic being who had that day saved Captain Tom's life.

He was in the act of speaking to our hero, when he beheld the dark eyes of the pale and wounded man fixed upon him.

The words were checked upon his lips, and his hand went mechanically to his side.

Luckily it was without a weapon.

A visible tremor passed over his powerful frame, and his eyes kindled with sudden passion; he crouched as though about to spring.

Ben Barnacle half arose from his seat, and clutched the hilt of his cutlass.

Then, as though yielding to better feeling, Iron Arm stepped across the thwarts, the evil light fading from his eyes, and his lips relaxed from their stern compression to a half smile.

Ben reseated himself, and gazed strangely at the muscular form of the man whose sudden presence had so powerfully excited him.

Iron Arm stooped over Ben's form, and in a voice so low that it reached only the ears of him whose strange, wondering look showed the fearful conflict within, said, as he extended his hand:

"For his sake, let the past remain in oblivion."

"Be it so," was the reply, spoken in the same low tone. "Let us meet as strangers—the bitter memories of the past for a time forgotten."

A grave inclination of the head gave token of acquiescence, and Iron Arm went back to the bow of the boat.

Here Captain Tom, Harry Vere, and others of the band were grouped, watching with great interest the movements of the *San Josef*.

Until the moment when the young leader and his companions were picked up by the boats, the pirate vessel had been rapidly sailing before the wind.

While the boats were lying to, the *San Josef's* courses were hauled up, and to the surprise of all, the huge vessel was seen describing a circle.

"They have found out," he said, "how their bullets failed to stop us."

"Curse him, yes!" said Iron Arm. "He will be down on us in less than an hour."

"Let him come," said the young leader. "With true, gallant fellows at my back, I will rescue Minnie, or die in the attempt."

"We have no chance," said Iron Arm. "Once on the deck we could hold our ground; but we shall never be able, I am afraid, to board the *San Josef*."

"I will make the attempt,"

"We shall not get near enough."

"That scoundrel's heavy guns will smash these life-boats before we can get within two fathoms of his vessel."

Captain Tom knew the terrible disadvantages under which he stood, and looking around at his followers, said:

"My lads, in that ship is all I hold dear. I know it is almost asking you to walk into the cold embrace of death. I want but one boat; who will volunteer?"

With one voice the reply came.

"I will—I will!"

"Think again," said the young leader. "We shall be at the mercy of his guns. There is time to get back to the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* for those who value their lives."

How proudly the gallant leader's heart beat beneath the golden coat of mail as his followers repeated their cry.

"You will all come with me?"

"We will. Lead us on! We will rescue the lady or die."

"Thanks, my brave fellows. There is but one chance for us—a bold dash, when we are near enough. Now, spread yourselves out, and keep as clear of the shot as possible."

"Ay—ay, sir!"

Captain Tom Drake's dispositions for the fight was soon made.

Harry Vere, with the barge, was to operate on the starboard bow, Ben and the pinnace on the larboard bow, while the young leader, in the cutter, would make for the *San Josef's* stern.

There was no dissenting voice to this arrangement, and as a white puff of smoke came from the ship's bows, the boats dispersed.

The shot fell short of its mark, and Ben Barnacle, who had watched the iron messenger of destruction bound from wave to wave, muttered, angrily:

"They will get the range directly. Would to Heaven the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* were here."

There was a long interval before another gun was fired.

The pirates were for a moment baffled by the sudden dispersion of the boats.

Each of the light craft pulled in a zig-zag direction, thus rendering the aim of the pirate's gunners more difficult.

Three white jets proceeded simultaneously

from the vessel. This time one of the balls came so near their boat that the oar was taken from the cutter's bow-oarsman, and riven into splinters.

"Are you hurt Maxwell?" asked Tom, as the man fell back over the thwart.

"No, sir."

"That is fortunate. Starboard your helm, there."

"Starboard it is, sir."

"Keep it so, and the nose of the boat in a line with the fellow's bowsprit."

"Ay—ay, sir."

There was another long interval, then the pirate ship swung around, and, as though they determined to crush their audacious pursuers, a lurid sheet of flame ran along the vessel's side.

"Here comes his larboard battery. Down, every man, for his life!"

The crew threw themselves forward, and the iron storm came hurtling over their heads.

"I thought so," was Tom's cool comment. "They fired when we were in the trough of the sea. What did you say, Mr. Vere?"

"The barge is struck, sir."

"Serious?"

"I fear so. There is a hole just between wind and water."

"Stuff a jacket in. Now, my lads, a good pull before he can reload. Down with the helm!"

"Ay—ay, sir."

The dark hull of the *San Josef* rose above the water like a huge beast of prey, and her forecastle could be seen crowned with turbaned heads.

"She can sail well," was Captain Tom's remark, as his fearless eyes were fixed upon the coming vessel. "Mr. Vere."

"Ay—ay, sir."

"Use that howitzer of yours; cram it with musket balls for the benefit of that mob on the bows."

The tiny gun was loaded nearly to the muzzle with the deadly ammunition, and Harry Vere, waiting until the boat arose to the top of a wave, fired.

The work of the closely packed charge was plainly audible as it rattled upon the huge ship, and closely following the sound of splintering wood, a confused yell of pain was borne upon the breeze.

"That has cleared the forecastle," said Captain Tom. "Try again, Mr. Vere."

The barge had fallen far behind the other boats, and as the cutter dashed onward Harry Vere called out:

"We are done for, sir. A plank has started."

Captain Tom uttered a cry of anger.

"Are you filling?"

"We are."

"Back water, my lads. We must take them on board."

"No, sir; go on; we shall be safe until the—"

Harry Vere's last words were drowned by a deafening report in the rear.

That report was the roar of the *Will-o'-the-Wisp's* guns.

The smart crew had rigged jury-masts, and under the mystic cloud of smoke, had glided within gun-shot of the pirate vessel.

A shout from the boats greeted the arrival of the gallant vessel, and many who had felt death so near, now breathed freely.

Even the steel-nerved young leader gave a cry of joy as the ship dashed on to grapple with the huge vessel which, reeling under the unexpected broadside, was endeavoring to go about and escape.

"Grapple with them!" shouted Captain Tom; "we shall soon join you."

"Hurrah!" came from the middies, as they sent another close shower of shot into the Death Pirate's timbers, "Hurrah for Captain Tom!"

Under the excitement of the moment, the young leader took off his cap and cheered in return.

"We have them now," said Iron Arm, as he quickly broke the blade off a long oar; "there will be a short reckoning this time."

He balanced the heavy weapon in his hand, and the gleam in his dark eyes boded ill for the pirate horde.

The cutter and pinnace followed closely in the wake of the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, and the barge, not to be left behind in the coming fight, had an extra jacket in her shot-hole, and made every effort to keep up.

"Pull!" cried Captain Tom, waving his light sword. "Let the ship attack them on the starboard; we will pay our respects on the other side."

As he spoke, the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* ranged up alongside the *San Josef*, and cast the grappling-irons on board.

The pirates fought with that desperation which despair alone can give.

Too well they knew the fate that would befall

them should the Boy Buccaneers once gain a footing upon the deck.

Maimed and bleeding by the terrible blow he had received from Iron Arm's mace, the pirate leader lay upon a pile of cushions, giving directions to his crew.

By his orders the grappling-irons were cast overboard before they could get entangled, and the sides of the *San Josef* were thronged with her fierce, dark crew.

"Keep them off—keep them off!" shouted the Death Pirate, in a voice in which rage and pain were strangely mingled; "beat them back, tars! Sheathe your blades in their bodies!"

The pirates answered with a fierce yell, and pressed to the side in dark swarms.

From every part of the *San Josef* that offered a chance of reaching the *Will-o'-the-Wisp* they sprang, and cutlass in hand, leaped on board.

Many fell into the sea, others catching desperately at the shrouds, or whatever offered, sought to board the buccaneers.

Those who clung to the rigging had their hands severed from the wrist, and uttering the most diabolical cries, fell into the ocean, or were jammed between the hulls of the vessels as they grated together.

Some of the Moorish horde reached the deck of *Will-o'-the-Wisp* only to be hurled back by her gallant defenders.

Everywhere in this first daring attempt to board, the hated Moslems were met with equal determination; and of the number of those who gained the forecastle, not one escaped the shot or steel of the young buccaneers.

Vainly did the Death Pirate yell to his crew to cut down the small band that defended their ship, and the crowds of yelling demons were met at every point.

Again a dark mass of bearded Moors made a rush to board the buccaneers. This time such a hurricane of slaughter swept among them that they recoiled, with the most horrible curses and imprecations upon their lips.

Well for Harry Martin, who was in charge of the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, that he had made his last attempt, or his small band of middies would have been swept from the deck by the mere force of numbers.

The boy, with a skill that would have done credit to many an older hand, prepared for the onslaught.

He saw the boats were yet too far to give him any potent aid, and knew his attempt to board the pirate would be but a waste of life against such fearful odds.

While the greater portion of his followers defended the bulwarks with such firm resolution, he took three men and loaded one of the larboard guns to the muzzle with grape.

He waited until the dense mass rallied and prepared to rush over the side; then his voice, loud and clear, rang out above the yell of the pirates.

"Now—now! pour in your fire!"

The gun belched forth its flight of destruction, and the howling demons were driven back with terrific slaughter.

Mingled with the oaths of the buccaneers and the screams of the dying, came the hearty hurrahs of Captain Tom's comrades, as they followed their young leader up the side of the huge ship.

Like devils incarnate the Moorish horde fought against the sudden attack.

But vainly.

The irresistible torrent was not to be stopped or turned aside.

Iron Arm fought like a lion beside his new leader.

Weilding the novel weapon he had prepared in the boat, he swept down all who came within reach of his arm.

Maddened by the sight, the Death Pirate yelled out:

"Receive them on your pikes! A thousand dollars for the man who slays that renegade, Iron Arm!"

A scornful laugh came from the giant's lips, and scattering his foes right and left, he hewed a passage for those in his rear.

Captain Tom, Ben Barnacle, Harry Vere, and others of the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, seconded the efforts of the terrible being who had placed himself in the van of the fight.

Their sharp blades struck the stout pikes straight in twain for the Moors, packed in a dense mass, leveled the bristling points of their dangerous weapons to stay the advance of the leaders.

The fight was now close and deadly, and at times doubtful of success.

In spite of the recent carnage among the pirates, they still outnumbered by far Captain Tom's crew.

Yet numbers were of but little avail against the determined phalanx who fought so stubbornly for the foothold they had gained.

Every sweep of Tom's sword was fatal; every

circle of his bright blade left a gashed face or headless trunk. He fought to rescue one who was dear to him, and whose honor was at stake.

So back, step by step, the pirate horde were forced until the living mass were grouped across the hatchway.

Through this crowd Captain Tom, Iron Arm, and Ben tried to cleave a passage.

For the living wall stood between them and Minnie Atherton.

The Death Pirate saw their motive, and gnashing his teeth with impotent rage, called out:

"Below there, one of you, and cut that girl's throat!"

The order was heard and understood by Iron Arm as he stooped to pick up his terrible steel mace, which lay where he had hurled it at the Death Pirate.

The massive weapon once more in his grasp, he felt able to contend with a host, and as he dashed like a thunderbolt among the Moslems, he sang out to Captain Tom:

"Quick! as you value your lady's life!"

Right and left, like nine-pins, the pirates fell before the sweep of his terrible weapon; and as he reached the top of the hatch, his mace fell upon the skull of the miscreant who had begun to descend to slay the beautiful Minnie.

As the man fell prone and lifeless, his skull crushed and undistinguishable, the lithe form of the young buccaneer sprang down the steps.

He had comprehended Iron Arm's meaning, and fearful that another might creep down by the forehatch, and slay his love, he slew all who came before him, and flew past Iron Arm, his blade raised on high.

The Death Pirate saw himself baffled, and the white foam gathered thickly on his lips as the buccaneer cut down his crew.

"Both friend and foe," he howled, "shall die!"

Amidships stood a mortar crammed to the muzzle with shells, and from this fearful engine of slaughter the merciless wretch fired terrible missiles among the combatants.

The sparks flew from the blazing fuse, the shells soared upward, then fell to the deck, resounded, then broke into fragments, and slew both Moors and Christians, and through the iron hail could be seen the form of Captain Tom dashing headlong with Zelig on his arm.

CHAPTER XL

CAPTAIN TOM ON THE DESTROYER'S TRAIL.

SAFELY on board his own vessel, Captain Tom placed the senseless form of Zelig in safety.

His foot was upon the bottom step—another moment and he would have been on deck had not the voice of Zelig arrested him.

"Whither go you?" she asked. "Has your red, thirsty blade not drunk enough blood for one day?"

Captain Tom turned his angry face towards the speaker.

"It has not, Zelig," he replied, "nor would it, were the lives of my foes as many as the sands by the shore, and I had them all within my grasp."

"Be careful," she said, pleadingly. "The mystic Death Pirate has a terrible engine of destruction when he finds himself in dire peril—one," she added, "that will send both his friends and foes into eternity."

"What mean you, Zelig?"

"Be warned," she said. "Zelig has never yet spoken falsely."

There was something in the girl's voice and manner that caused the impetuous boy to pause.

"You warn me, Zelig," he said. "Give the object of your words some tangible shape, that I may know where to meet the danger."

"Go not on board the Death Pirate's ship; you have worked him enough misery for one day."

"Zelig, this is madness. Think you that the treacherous trick by which he gained possession of that poor girl can be requited by less than his life?"

"If you value your own life, or value those about you, hearken to my words—go not on board that vessel again."

"Were a thousand—"

"A million brave men could not save you from certain death! Listen—"

Admiral Tom beat the deck impatiently with his foot.

"From the magazine of the *San Josef*," Zelig resumed, "her commander has wires leading to his cabin. A golden tassel, that hangs above his cot, would fire the train that would blow you and your ship into atoms!"

"Enough, Zelig; he shall never reach his cabin to pull that tassel—"

A terrible roar at that moment, followed by the recoil of the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*, caused the young chieftain to rush upon deck.

It seemed as though Zelig's words were proved, and the pirate ship blown into the air.

Zelig fell upon her knees when the terrible sound burst upon them, and hiding her face with her hands, prayed for the life of him she loved to be spared.

When Captain Tom rushed on Deck, he found the main and fore-mast hanging over the side, and a number of cannons hurled from their carriages.

A score of his crew were also struck down, and everywhere men were running hurriedly towards the yet undamaged guns.

He looked towards the *San Josef*, and an angry exclamation fell from his lips as he beheld the pirate vessel, her yards dressed from deck to truck, sailing swiftly away.

He turned towards his officers to ask an explanation of this sudden change in affairs.

Both Ben Barnacle and Harry Vere were being conveyed below to the care of Dr. Shrike and his man Jacob.

From this sad sight he turned his eyes sorrowfully, and met those of young Harry Martin, who was hastening towards his young chief.

The boy touched his cap respectfully, and said:

"It was not our fault, sir. We followed you closely, but by some misfortune the vessels became separated before Lieutenant Vere, Ben Barnacle, and that brave fellow, Iron Arm, could get aboard."

Captain Tom looked around for the giant form of Iron Arm, and not seeing him, his heart anticipated fatal news.

"We saw them fighting hard with these copper-colored devils, and made a run to their assistance. We were too late, sir. Mr. Vere and Ben Barnacle had no time to jump on board."

"Iron Arm—what of him?" was the anxious query.

"He was struck down, sir, as he leaped on the bulwarks, and either fell overboard, or on the *San Josef's* deck."

"Curses! I would not have had harm happen to that gallant fellow for the sea's worth."

"We knew that, sir, and made an attempt to board the pirate—this is the result."

He pointed to the broken masts and the torn bulwarks.

The last broadside had done more mischief to the hull of the ship than any engagement the dashing vessel had ever been in previously.

It was the last and only blow the pirates were capable of striking—one that had enabled them to get clear of their determined little foe; and to the Death Pirate's joy, Iron Arm was in his power.

Regret for what had occurred was useless, and the young leader, for the time striving to banish the thought of Iron Arm's probable fate from his mind, set to work to rig jury-masts, and bring the shattered vessel into sailing condition again.

His crew, longing to avenge the loss of those who had fallen, worked with a will, and in three hours the gallant little vessel was cleaving the waters.

The *San Josef* had long since disappeared in the distant horizon, and Admiral Tom, with his dark eyes fixed upon the spot where the last white speck of his foe's sails had sunk into invisibility, stood moodily upon the quarter-deck.

His soul was filled with bitterness as he thought of the fate that his gallant friend would have to meet.

The young buccaneer knew enough of the Death Pirate's pitiless nature to assure him that a sharp and sure death would be the result of Iron Arm's captivity.

Other thoughts added to the intensity of his agony, and he felt as though the mystic voice of Nature whispered strange words respecting Iron Arm to his ears.

The young leader's heart, which in the hottest fire never quickened its pulsation, now beat fast and audible.

The boy's mind had gone back to the time when he knelt at his mother's knees, and uttered a simple prayer for one for whom his little lambs were clothed in solemn garb of mourning.

He remembered once, when borne down by the weight of his childish sorrow, he had strayed from his mother's side, and sought the green fields.

He remembered, while sitting there, and child-like, wondering why his mother's sweet, sad face should so often be bathed in tears, a tall, handsome stranger, who came to his side, in soothing tones told him not to weep, for his father would one day return, not from the grave, but from a far-off land, where he was held in bondage.

He remembered, too, the stranger going to their cottage, and when he followed soon after, seeing his mother clasped to the stranger's breast.

Then came her joyful tones as she bid him kneel and receive a father's blessing.

Then came a chasm in the chain of long-forgotten events.

Then a sad, hideous story of two men dying by each other's hands—one, his father.

The mental torture he suffered when he fancied he recognized the tones of Iron Arm's voice resembled those of his parent, maddened him; and half frantic with excitement, he involuntarily said: "No—no! it is too horrible. It is a mere fancied resemblance—"

"To whom?" asked a voice at his side.

Captain Tom turned suddenly, his hand upon the hilt of his sword.

It was withdrawn when he recognized the speaker, and, extending his hand, he said:

"I am glad to see you here, Ben. I fear my day's work has upset me a little."

"Little wonder," said Ben, taking the proffered hand. "It has done the same to us all."

"Are you badly hurt, Ben?"

"No. I fell against a gun-carriage and lost my senses. It was lucky I remained there, or I should have received on board this ship what my enemies failed to give me."

"What is that, Ben?"

"My death. That cursed doctor of yours and his phantom were making preparations to take a piece out of my skull."

"They wanted a subject, perhaps."

"They have one now—at least, the doctor has."

"How?"

"I doubled up his mummy, and left the old villain about to bleed his precious Jacob. But, by the way, what were you raving about when I came on deck? It must have been something more than usual to have stirred your nature."

Captain Tom hesitated before he answered Ben's direct interrogation.

The boy's rapid, brilliant career, since he had spurned the hateful yoke of servitude under his worst foes, had shut him off from the companionship of men.

As commander of the vessel which now bore him so swiftly over the rippling water, he could not freely associate with his officers, could not maintain discipline by a free interchange of thought.

When Ben spoke, he felt the need of a companion—such a companion that could calm his perturbed spirit, and drive away the melancholy which hung over his soul.

"I was much disturbed," Tom said, at length. "The excitement caused by the loss of the man who so nobly saved me from death brought a long-forgotten episode of my life before me."

"You allude to Iron Arm?"

"I do."

Ben's features changed slightly, but his dark, earnest gaze was fixed upon his young leader's face.

"From what I could gather," Ben said, "from your disjointed words, this Iron Arm bore a resemblance to one whose memory is fraught with pain."

"You are correct in your supposition, Ben; but, after all, I must be wrong. He perished years ago."

"Of whom do you speak?"

"My father."

Ben Barnacle's face changed, and for a moment Captain Tom looked at him steadily.

"You associate Iron Arm's voice with him. You fancy a resemblance exists between him and your father."

"Yes, frankly, yes. Do you know anything of him? You have met before?"

"We have."

"Tell me, I implore you—tell me truly, is he—"

Tom paused, surprised into silence by the turbulent emotion of Ben Barnacle.

"He is not," answered Ben. "Your wild fancy has led you astray."

"You know—"

"Nothing more that I dare tell now. Bide your time—bide your time. Look! Who comes here? friend or foe?" and as he spoke the voice of the lookout reported the sail Ben's eagle glance had already seen.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MAN OF MANY LIVES.

THE strange sail proved to be a friend.

One of the many "tenders" he employed to keep him posted on home affairs, and by whose agency he had succeeded so well in defying the powers that were constantly on the alert for him.

They exchanged signals and lost no time in ranging alongside of each other; a boat put off from the brig and rowed to the *Will-o'-the-Wisp*.

An officer clambered up the ship's side, and approaching Captain Tom, handed him a leather bag locked and full of dispatches.

Most of them Captain Tom merely glanced over and cast aside, until he came to two—both of them

evidently of importance, but one puzzled him, for it was unexpected.

When he had made application for citizenship he had made many friends, and one of them was a naval officer of high rank.

From this gentleman he received the following dispatch.

"UNITED STATES NAVY YARD, WASHINGTON, D. C.

"TO CAPTAIN THOMAS DRAKE:

"SIR:—Recent complications with Great Britain render another war inevitable. The government will gladly give you an advantageous command should you make application for one. I have, in fact, instructions to forward you your commission as soon as I hear from you on the subject.

"Yours, etc. —"

Tom's face flushed proudly.

"A fitting field," he muttered. Then he read the other dispatch; it was from his lawyer in Canada.

He rang a bell for an attendant the moment he read it.

"Send Mr. Barnacle to me," he said.

The boy retired, and Ben answered the summons directly.

"Ben," he said, when his stalwart lieutenant entered, "we sail for America at once. Read that."

Ben was no less astonished than he had been.

"You will accept?"

"I am an American citizen, but before I even accept the command, I have something else to do."

"Where?"

"At my uncle's old home."

"But you will not trust yourself on British soil, sir."

"For my mother's and my uncle's sake I shall. I would enter the king's palace were it needful."

"You have news of them?"

"I have, Ben, and God grant it may be true—news that my mother lives, and that my poor old Uncle Gregory is well and hearty, thanks to the skill and care of a noble-hearted doctor in the lunatic asylum where my poor old uncle was placed. By Heavens, I will avenge them. Read!"

We must precede our hero on his homeward bound voyage, and reveal the secrets of his youth.

The genial old fellow, Gregory, was no longer brightening its threshold—all had changed—sadly changed, and its new master had been a dissolute and profligate one—the scoundrel, Sanderson.

But to him, when his guests have departed and the place is silent, it is a haunted house—aye, always—though he has an army of servants to break the accursed dullness and gloom.

Haunted as it is on this night when his guests are gone and he is alone.

This man's mind is never happy.

Sleeping or waking, his guilty conscience is filled with hideous visions.

In vain he tries to dissipate them.

Wine is as weak as water, and the strongest brandy is little better.

His ill-gotten wealth sits heavily on him.

Indeed, he would almost wish now that he could get rid of it.

It hangs to him like a frightful nightmare.

The only moments of repose he ever finds is when his house is filled with guests, who pour their adulations into his ear, neglecting not to make him think he is all-powerful, and one of the happiest beings in existence.

For a moment he forgets himself.

He tries to drink in their flattering eulogiums—endeavors, indeed, to think that he, of all his surrounding companions, is the happiest.

Under the influence of strong wines and bright, sparkling conversation, he is not quite so miserable.

But the instant his crowd of servile adulators take their departure, the same old frightful phantasy follows him from room to room, giving him no peace, and making him wish that he were dead.

Thus passes the life, day in and day out, of this miscreant's career.

Not a moment's happiness.

Always in guilty terror.

Fearing every instant that his crime will be discovered, and that a death of ignominy will be the result.

Captain Angel he has given up thinking of altogether.

He fancies that that once hated enemy is dead.

Indeed, one dark, stormy night, a few months before, a villainous-looking man came to his place, and after obtaining an interview, informed him that his arch enemy had fallen into the hands of Barbary pirates, and was, after a short shrift, made to walk the plank, and heaved over into the sea.

He sank from view, and was never seen afterwards.

This fellow told his story with such an earnest face that Sanderson believed him, and sent him away with a well-filled purse for his information.

The guilty lieutenant, now that he had got rid of a most dangerous enemy, for some time felt easier in his mind, and even flattered himself that the time would come when he would be happy.

But vain hope!

Three or four weeks after he was just as miserable as ever, and hoped that his hated rival was alive to relieve him of a burden that sat like lead on his soul.

He would only be too glad now if he could restore Angel to life, and hand him over every fraction of the property.

But we are describing this night.

The man Sanderson is oppressed with strange fears.

His face is haggard, his eyes bloodshot, and his stalwart frame a feeble picture of what he once was.

The library looks very comfortable.

A brilliant fire burns in the well-polished grate, and wafts an air of comfort through the apartment.

There is everything in that room that can conduce to the comfort, and even luxury, of its one solitary occupant.

The ivory-inlaid table groans beneath a profusion of wines and brandies of the costliest description.

But these serve not to cool the man's parched lips or fevered brow.

They rather increase his sufferings, for their contents only burn his blood, without giving him that coveted moment of forgetfulness.

"My God, what a life of guilt!" murmured the wretched man, as he paced the library. "If these frightful thoughts continue they must end in sending me to the madhouse. But, God knows, I deserve nothing better. The torments of hades consume me, body and soul! Never a moment's peace! Oh! if I could only have foreseen this, what agony—what suffering I might have spared myself. But for that wretched woman I should never have gone so far, and even she, in the bitterness of her hate, and fiendish malignity, haunts me, and serves with the other horrible visions to make my life intolerable."

Sanderson paused to give utterance to his thoughts—had paused with hands clenched convulsively, and starting eyeballs and chattering teeth.

Notwithstanding the warm, healthful glow that the fire threw out he shook like an aspen.

Shook, indeed, as if exposed to the most bitter of bitter cold nights.

Sounds of approaching steps came ringing into the library.

Perhaps some of the guests of the evening returning.

The sounds cheered him.

Anything now but to be by himself.

Indeed, any companionship was better than being alone.

A "rat-tat!" rung into the room, and on an invitation to enter, the door opened, and a head was thrust in.

The powdered head of one of Sanderson's footmen.

The ghastly face and wild eyes of the lieutenant made the man draw back quicker than he had thrust his head in.

Indeed, the great change in his master's features startled him very much.

"Fool! What are you staring at me in that way for?" cried Sanderson, furiously. "Come forward, or, by Heavens, I'll kick you down-stairs!"

As the man well knew what Sanderson was capable of doing under paroxysms of violent rage, he came in tremblingly.

Indeed, if the lieutenant felt inclined, he would have found no difficulty in putting his threat of kicking this man down-stairs into execution.

For the fellow was weak and thin, and, no doubt, consumptive.

"Now what is your errand?" cried Sanderson, somewhat appeased at the cringing, servile manner of his attendant. "Have any of those gentlemen come back who were here this evening?"

"No, sir."

"Well, who then?"

"A person who wishes to see your honor."

"I know that, you fool! But who is this person? Did he give you his name? What is he like?"

To all these rapid inquiries the attendant returned answers in a stammering, confused sort of way.

"I—I don't know who he is, sir? He—he didn't give me his name. He—he—he looks—"

"Like what, you scoundrel? Answer at once, or I'll give you what you deserve!"

"He appeared like one of those smugglers we

occasionally see in the village, your honor. He may be a seaman, and again he may not."

"What a doltish ass! What do you mean by saying that he may be a seaman and he may not be a seaman?"

"I mean this, sir—that he has a seafaring cut about him, but he doesn't look like an honest man. He is tall and thin; his face is one I can never forget—a most villainous looking physiognomy, sir."

"Indeed!"

"I assure you of it, sir."

"Well, what does he want?"

"To see you."

"And wouldn't send his name up?"

"He objected to that, your honor."

"Who the fiend can it be?" thought Sanderson. "Tall, thin, with a villainous looking look about him. A great many might answer that description. Tell this villainous looking fellow that if he don't send up his name that he cannot see me," added the lieutenant, aloud.

"Your visitor is here to answer for himself!" cried a harsh, grating voice from the door at this moment.

The tones were familiar.

They sent a chill of ice to Sanderson's heart.

Could the ocean throw up its dead?

The answer came by the tall, thin, villainous looking gentleman walking past the astonished footman, and announcing himself.

Before he passed the threshold, however, he caught the footman by the nape of the neck, and ejecting him from the room, closed the door.

Sanderson gaped with horror.

His eyes seemed to start from their sockets.

A livid terror overspread his face.

There stood before him, indeed, the very man whom he had an instant before been thinking of. His arch-enemy.

Captain Angel!

This was the individual whom he thought had been dead.

And still thought dead.

The superstitious element of his whole nature was thoroughly aroused.

"Back—back!" he cried, in a stifled voice, and the next moment he fell senseless at Angel's feet.

With a glare of hatred Angel leaned over him.

What his intention was at that instant is hard to say.

Sounds of hurried steps were heard on the stairs.

No doubt the footman returning with assistance.

Angel straightened up and faced the door.

A smile of contempt lit up his face.

The door was flung open.

A dozen servants appeared, armed with every available weapon they could find.

"That's him—that's him!" cried the attendant.

"That's the villain who forced his way into Mr. Sanderson's presence. I told him to stop below, but he would come up, and this is the result," pointing to the prostrate body of his master.

"The lieutenant is dead, no doubt!" said he who appeared to have the lead.

"And murdered by this villain!" said another.

"Let us rush upon him!" cried a third.

"Ay—ay; that's the way to secure him. Besides, we can keep him here till the police come."

Their intentions were good.

But their courage was not.

So, instead of rushing forward, they held back.

There was something stern and deadly in the glitter of Captain Angel's eye, which was quite enough to warrant them keeping a safe distance from him.

Besides, he had deliberately exposed two heavy navy pistols, which he as deliberately cocked.

Indeed, whatever brave act they meditated at the outset, vanished now like a fleeting cloud from the sun's surface.

Not one out of the dozen dared advance over the threshold.

But rather stood there trembling or retreating into the passage.

"Well, why don't you come on?" cried Angel.

"Fools! do you think for a moment I came here to slay your master?"

The captain's voice terrified them almost more than his pistols.

"Come," cried Angel, "give me proper treatment, and proper treatment shall you receive. In the first place, permit me to tell you I am an old friend of your master's, and believing me dead, he has fainted. Begone, you lazy rascals!" he added, "or I'll take the liberty presently of putting it out of your power. Begone!"

The servants were moving away, thoroughly frightened, when Angel called for two of them to stop.

"You two nearest the door will do," he cried.

"The rest may go."

Contrary to his order, they were all moving off, when Angel stepped forward, caught one by the shoulder and pulled him forcibly into the library.

"Now, be off!" he cried to the others. "If I see any of you again to-night, woe betide you!"

The ominous click of one of his pistols was enough.

The well-fed, lazy servants waiting to hear no more, ran down the stairs as fast as they could, until even the sounds of their steps were lost.

The man he hauled so unceremoniously into the room he treated a little better after that.

Especially that the others were gone.

Angel seemed to possess a wonderful power—indeed, if we may be allowed to use the expression, a true magnetic power—which he exercised with excellent effect on the terrified domestics.

"You see, your master has only fainted," said Angel, addressing the person he forced into the room.

"Yes, sir, I see that," replied the man.

But his words came tremblingly.

It could be seen that he was still very much frightened.

"We must revive him," said Angel.

"I think we must, sir."

"Have you any water here?"

"I should judge that there must be some, sir."

"Then go and get it, and we'll try what effect it will have."

"Might I suggest one thing, sir?"

"A hundred, if you like, if you don't take too long."

"A little brandy, sir."

"What about the brandy?"

Angel could see the servant's eyes cast lovingly on the various bottles that lined the ivory-inlaid table.

"It's a good reviver, sir; I may say, a splendid reviver."

"For whom? For you or your master?"

"Oh, sir! Could you for a moment imagine that I would think of myself?"

"I am sure I don't know; but from the sparkle in your eyes one would think that you did want it for yourself. But as for that, my good fellow, a bottle will never be missed."

Lieutenant Sanderson was slowly but surely recovering.

"Take your bottle and be off," said Captain Angel. "And remember, should I catch you any more in this room to-night, I'll break every bone in your body!"

"There's no fear of my coming here again to-night, sir. And if you catch me, I'll give you leave not only to break my bones, but also to break my neck in the bargain."

The footman was only too glad to thus easily escape the presence of this ferocious-looking pirate.

For pirate or smuggler he had no doubt now but he was.

He rushed forward, took a bottle of the precious liquor from the table, and quickly decamped from the room, closing the door after him.

Meanwhile, the master of the mansion opened his bloodshot eyes.

For an instant or two he was unconscious of where he was. But only for an instant.

He soon caught the cold, merciless face of Angel, whose flashing eyes were bent in deadly hatred on him.

He was so frightened that he could not for some time even utter a syllable.

He had not got over the notion yet but that it was the captain's disembodied spirit that appeared to him.

And when he did manage to find utterance, he began to shriek loudly for help.

"Help—help!" rang in startling cadences through the library, awakening a hundred ghostly echoes through the old house.

But Angel, giving vent to an oath, soon silenced him by clapping his hand over his mouth.

"Curse you! can't you keep still?" cried the fierce pirate.

These words, indubitably human, had some effect.

They had the effect of making him believe that Angel was living instead of dead.

This thought terrified him almost more than the other.

Perhaps the captian had come to demand satisfaction for the attempt that had been made to murder him.

Sanderson knew only too well the desperate and revengeful character of his colleague!

He now expected nothing less than death at his hands.

And, for a moment, closed his eyes in despair. Indeed, his terror of Angel had always been great.

"Open your eyes, fool!" cried Angel, in his harsh, grating tones, "or, perhaps, I shall be forced to open them for you."

Sanderson, without complying, gave vent to a deep groan.

"Do you still think that I am dead?" cried Angel, with a malicious laugh. "The account I sent you worked well. Ha, ha, ha! Fell into the hands of Barbary pirates, and then made to walk the plank, and hurled into the sea! So you thought your dear friend Angel would never more trouble you? Eh, Sanderson? Is that what you thought? Conscious in the strength of your honesty and virtue, after that you became happy—grew, indeed, very happy. How has all this ill-gotten wealth got on with you—eh, Sanderson? You don't seem to thrive on it—ha, ha, ha!"

The captain's merciless laugh sent a chill of ice through the veins of Lieutenant Sanderson.

He unclosed his bloodshot eyes slowly.

Looked upon his persecutor in a half-imploring manner.

But no mercy—not even the remotest spark—could he discern in those deep, sinister eyes.

They were hard as steel.

Cold and pitiless.

"It is no use, Sanderson," went on his tormentor. "You have made your bed, and there you must lie. Now, permit me, first of all, to help you to your feet. I don't do this, mind, out of any feeling of sympathy for your condition, but rather that you can hear what I have to say in a position not quite so grovelly. By Heavens, man! you have wasted to almost nothing. Sanderson, a shadow of his former self."

"Ha, ha, ha! I know parties to whom this, no doubt, would be very capital news. But why should I speak of them? You shall see them yourself before long, and the interview, no doubt, will delight you."

Angel now picked up his former colleague as if he had been a child, and having so done carried him quite easily to a chair.

Of course Sanderson made a very great struggle to get away.

This indignity was a little too much for him.

And it lent him courage to make a vigorous effort for his release.

But all this did not avail him a bit, as Captain Angel held him in his arms as if he had been in a vise.

"Come, my infant, what is the good of struggling?" cried Angel, jeeringly. "You are by no means as you have been, Sanderson. Your ill-gotten gains have weighed so heavily on your soul that they have not only reduced you in bulk, but weakened you materially. Who could ever think that sudden great wealth would have such influence?"

"Leave me, monster!" cried Sanderson, no longer able to control his rapidly-rising indignation, in which even his dread of the merciless pirate sank for the time into utter insignificance.

"Leave you!" cried Angel, banteringly. "Ah, my dear Sanderson, you ask too much. We cannot part like this. Besides, there is some little reckoning between us—the discharge of a little debt, for instance. You cannot have so treacherous a memory as to forget that there is a nice little settlement between us. It is not much, my dear Sanderson—not very much, indeed. But as I am the creditor, etc., you must permit me to tell you we cannot part thus. Ha! what a liver you are, my dear friend. Brandy, wines, etc. Why, it's enough to make one's mouth water. Perhaps a stimulant may have some good effect upon you. Allow me to help you to one."

Captain Angel strode over to the ivory-inlaid table, and poured out a glass of the brandy.

This he drank himself.

While he was thus engaged, Lieutenant Sanderson stole a march on him, or was rather making for the door to call in the assistance of his menials.

He wondered how it was that they had let this man pass them.

There were plenty in the house, and by their aid he hoped to secure Angel, or if not, to eject him from the place.

But the captain's sharp eyes observed the movement.

He drew forth a pistol.

A certain death-like click broke upon the silence of the room.

Sanderson turned and saw the dangerous gleam of the polished fire-arm.

"Come back!" cried Angel, in his cold, grating tones. "Come back, Sanderson, or I'll put a bullet through your head!"

And the lieutenant well knew that his enemy was quite capable of doing that.

He paused.

Paused to consider whether he would go on or come back.

But the deadly barrel of the pistol pointed in line with his head was a little too much for him.

He walked slowly back.

His face deadly pale, his teeth chattering with rage and fear.

"Ha, ha!" my dear Sanderson, I knew that you would obey me!" laughed the pirate. "Besides," he added, "if you did call your powdered lackeys they would not have answered you."

"What!" cried the lieutenant, in sudden fear.

Oh! if he had only the power at this moment he would have taken this man's life a hundred times over.

CHAPTER XLII.

SANDERSON FACE TO FACE WITH JOHN GREGORY AND MRS. DRAKE.

"You ask me 'what?'" said Angel, forcing a glass of brandy into Sanderson's hand. "I'll tell you 'what,' then. Your lazy, overfed lackeys came up here with the intention to overpower me, believing I had killed you. It did not take me long to send them back again in a different way to what they came. And now, let me inform you, that if you were to shout murder at the top of your voice, you need expect no assistance at their hands."

"Cursed cowards!" groaned Sanderson.

"That is really a fact," replied Angel. "Cowards they, indeed, are."

Angel's deep malignity could not be hidden under the rather affable exterior he assumed.

He resembled, at that moment, a cat on the point of pouncing upon a mouse.

Nor was Sanderson deceived by his manner.

He knew that something terrible was to occur yet.

What that something was he would like to find out.

"I suppose you feel a little better now?" said Captain Angel. "Your brandy is excellent, and will, no doubt, have a good effect. Compose yourself. Sorry to see you look so haggard. But that—ha! ha! ha!—is perfectly understood. The ways of the transgressor, my dear Sanderson. The rest, you know, is not worth repeating."

The lieutenant looked up in despair.

Then spoke slowly, so slowly that every word seemed to tremble on his lips.

"Why do you inflict further torture on me?" he asked.

Angel laughed spitefully.

"Why do I torture you?" he repeated. "For the very good and sufficient reason that I like to."

"Is it money you require?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I can pay you nobly——"

"To keep away," interrupted the other. "Ha! ha! ha! Money we all need."

"Name your sum," cried the other, eagerly.

He half fancied that Angel was in need of gold.

Now, if he handed him over a large sum, he might, quite possibly, get rid of him.

No sooner did this idea strike the lieutenant than he brightened up.

"Don't be afraid that I cannot give you the amount you require," he said.

"How very generous you are! Really, my dear Sanderson, your kindness is overwhelming."

"You have only to state the amount."

"Only to state the amount?"

"I said only, because I can give you whatever you ask."

"And pay me for all the trouble you have given me?"

"Even do that."

"And the agony you have caused me?"

"My dear Angel!"

"And the misery, and even poverty, you have inflicted on me?"

"That's too bad."

"Let bygones be bygones—eh?"

"Do so, I implore you!"

"What an angel of forgiveness you are, Sanderson. I suppose, now, that you forgive me?"

"Oh, yes. Need you ask?"

"And that I, of course, forgive you?"

"I hope so, indeed, from the bottom of my heart."

"So do I. It is a great pity that this Christian quality should not be more exercised. Oh, Sanderson, why are we not all better men?"

"Why, indeed!" rejoined Sanderson, sighing.

"The world is a very depraved one, old boy."

"So it is."

"And I am conscious we have both been bad men."

"I am afraid we have."

"Then let us go in for reform. What say you, Sanderson?"

Sanderson, as the reader may expect, could see all this leveled at him.

But thinking it best to agree with everything the other said, he entered with some spirit into it.

"I think that would be a very good plan, captain. Indeed, I have no longer any ill-feeling for you, and I am sure that you harbor none for me."

"Then why can't we be friends?"

"Ay, indeed, why can't we?"

"Very well then. Now for the amount?"

"Name it."

"A hundred thousand pounds, then."

"A hundred thousand!" exclaimed Sanderson, aghast. "You are surely jesting?"

"Not I. I never jest on money matters."

"No?"

"You may take my word for it. A hundred thousand pounds, not a fraction less."

"Do you really think I could realize that sum?"

"I have not given it one thought."

"Then you must not be unreasonable."

"Of course not."

"A hundred thousand pounds?" repeated the lieutenant, musingly.

"That is the amount to a farthing."

"It seems incredible."

"What?"

"That you should think for an instant of such a thing."

"Indeed!"

"It would be impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible to men of your kind, lieutenant!"

"You are mistaken."

"Nonsense!"

"But I say you are."

"Then if I am, I am."

"I am glad you concede that point."

"But I concede no point. It is a matter of business—a matter, indeed, of pounds, shillings and pence, waving friendship a-oneside."

A hundred thousand pounds!

Sanderson was staggered at the demand.

Where could he get such a sum?

Would the property realize it?

It might.

He doubted it very much.

Had he even twenty thousand at his banker's?

No! Emphatically no!

Ever since he came in for poor old Gregory's property, he led a very dissipated life.

The agonies he endured at first found some balm in squandering a great portion of the ready money that fell into his hands.

His balls and levees cost something.

Fabulous amounts were lost on races.

Besides, he had now the name of being the most hospitable gentleman in the county.

People did not, when they found him so generous, take the trouble to inquire how and by what means he came into John Gregory's estates.

They knew he spent his money with all the munificence of a prince.

And so they did not take the trouble to inquire further.

What was it to them how he came in for his money if he only regaled them with superb suppers, fine wines, and equally fine cigars.

He might, indeed, have been one of the most infamous wretches on the face of the earth, for all they cared.

And thus stood Lieutenant Sanderson with the county gentlemen.

But now about the hundred thousand pounds.

Seriously thinking, Captain Angel could not be in earnest.

He began in a bantering strain, and no doubt ended in one by making this exorbitant demand.

The very thought was absurd on the face of it.

Even twenty thousand would be very unreasonable, seeing how Sanderson had gone on while the property had been in his possession.

He could not give even that sum.

And that was one-fifth of what was asked.

Sanderson shuddered.

He knew the devilish nature of his enemy only too well. It was the cat and mouse business over again.

He was too helpless, in fact, to help himself.

And Angel, he was only too surely aware, would show him no mercy.

"Do you, without jest, really mean what you say?" said he, addressing Angel.

"Certainly," replied the captain. "Why should you think that I meant anything else?"

"The demand seems so preposterous."

"Indeed!"

"And, besides, could never be met."

"That is worse. However, it will have to be met."

"You have stated the result of non-compliance?"

"I have."

"Then, monster, do your worst!"

"Monster, to me? I am really surprised at you, Sanderson. For a moment I never expected such treatment. I was your dear friend, Angel, not

many moments ago, and now I am a monster. Could you not pile the abuse up a little higher? It would be very delightful, indeed. We were going to reform, and all that sort of thing, a little while since; but there goes reformation to the winds. Not only that, but you acknowledge that you were a very bad man, and that—not exactly as I state it—you were my enemy. We had assumed that great Christian quality of forgiving each other. And now, after all this, you actually turn on me and call me monster! and all because my present necessities demand a hundred thousand pounds."

"But remember, sir, that you threatened to hang me!"

"And, my dear Sanderson, you can depend on my doing it, too, if you don't accede to my demands."

"But I can't."

"You can't?"

"I tell you no—no—no, a thousand times."

"Now, to come to the point, Sanderson, why can't you?"

"Because it would be impossible for me to get one-fifth of the sum."

"Impossible?"

"I say impossible. There's scarcely twenty thousand pounds at the banker's."

Captain Angel chuckled like a fiend.

"Oh, my dear Sanderson," he said, "you have been playing a nice game, haven't you? Twenty thousand pounds at the banker's. Two hundred thousand originally. Been making money, Sanderson, fast—very fast, my good friend."

"You mean spending it, and losing it."

"I see you understand the irony. Had the property mortgaged, I suppose?"

"Not come to that yet."

"You are a really wonderful fellow, upon my soul, Sanderson. When you are swung off, we'll never meet your like again, I am sure. I wonder what would old John Gregory say if he turned up?"

"John Gregory!" exclaimed the now terrified lieutenant.

"Yes, John Gregory! He would think you a precious scamp, wouldn't he?"

"He is dead."

"Where's your proof?"

"Oh I've had sufficient proof."

"The old doctor, for instance?"

Sanderson turned from pale to livid.

The old doctor!

His secret was in the doctor's hands, and he paid him well for it.

Could the old rascal have betrayed him, then?

No!

It would not have been to his interest.

How came Angel to mention the doctor, then, with such marked significance?

There was some under-current of whose existence he knew nothing, and could only slightly guess at.

John Gregory was surely dead.

He was positive of that.

For had he not seen the old man lying in death with his own eyes?

In his coffin, in fact.

And was not that coffin sealed up, taken away, and lowered into the grave?

All this he had seen likewise.

"The old doctor, for instance," repeated Angel. "A very nice, unassuming old gentleman he is, too, Sanderson."

But the lieutenant did not say anything.

He was thunderstruck.

The reference to the doctor of the asylum was enough to arouse all his suspicions.

What could he do?

Or say?

Would it be wise to question Angel?

And if he did, would Angel answer him?

It seemed very unlikely that he could get much out of a man like his late colleague.

So he gave up the thought almost as soon as it came into his head.

What could he do now?

Angel was far more bitter and relentless than before.

Hidden as it was under a passably quiet exterior.

Should he defy him?

And if he did, what would be the result?

Denounced!

Brought to trial!

Executed!

And all because he still held property that would only bring ruin with it.

Property that was not his own, and defrauded from another.

Estates, for the possession of which, we may say, he had waded through human gore.

No, he would not die such a death.

It might just be possible that he could find time to draw some of the money, or, perhaps, the whole of it, out of the bank, and leave for some

out of the way place, where this awful Angel could not find him.

This he thought might be possible.

But he must work his cards well to do even that.

Above all, it would behoove him to act with great caution, as the captain was a man of great cunning and unlimited resources.

In Captain Angel he had an enemy of no mean capacity, indeed.

"Now, captain," said Sanderson, "it is hardly worth while wasting any more time. I have just been reflecting for the last few seconds, and can't see my way clear out of the difficulty. I have come to this conclusion, however, to pass into your hands the property."

"And everything else with it?" added Angel.

"To be sure. That was my intention."

"Indeed!" sneered Angel. "You are very generous, brother Sanderson."

"Do you doubt my word, sir?"

"Not for a moment."

"Well?"

"I say you are generous. What more can I say?"

"And you accept—"

"The twenty thousand pounds also in the bank."

"I meant to have made especial mention of that."

"How kindly considerate you are," answered Angel, with a covert sneer, and a change so sudden and ominous in his manner.

"Sanderson," he said, with the old ferocity upon him, "this fooling must cease. You played a cunning game when I had served your purpose."

"You forget that I did not play at all till I learned that you were scheming to get rid of me."

"You lie, Sanderson! It was these hands that sent Gregory to the madhouse. These hands that helped to place Mrs. Drake where she could do us no harm, and for what—an offer of a few miserable thousands. I told you then that I would be part owner in this property—your greed and your cursed jealousy of that woman, Harpy, set you at work formig plans for my destruction, John Sanderson."

The light in Angel's eyes now was a deadly glitter, and his face flushed.

"I swore an awful oath on that night when you had me kidnapped on board that Yankee slaver that I would live to repay you. I have lived through fire, through tempest and wreck. The very devil must have imbued me with some of his own life. I could fill a volume with my sufferings and privations. The promised tortures of the damned cannot be one hundred-part the tortures that I suffered."

Sanderson began to tremble; had he been armed he would have forced an issue at once, but he knew too well that if he made a false move Angel would show him no mercy.

"I could have killed you to-night," he went on, "but I do not deal in mercy."

"Mercy!"

"Ay, mercy! Death is merciful to us in some conditions; that which is inevitable, and that may come upon us at any time—that is faced with calmness and fortitude by children—by boys and men alike on the battle field, and freely sought by women who cannot carry a heavy load of disgrace—is merciful; to you—it would have been to me had I not sworn to live to be avenged on you."

"Be careful, Angel. I am not alone in the house."

"I am aware of it. I am here."

He laughed his old dry, mocking laugh then, and strode to one of the windows which he opened with one hand, while with the other he covered Sanderson with a pistol.

Then he took a whistle from his pocket, and blew it shrilly three times.

"The torture that I have suffered shall be yours," he said. "The fate you planned for me I have planned for you. A manacled and branded slave shall be free in comparison to your captivity, and when you are writhing under the torture of your lacerated flesh you can relieve your sufferings by thinking of me here enjoying what you have left of this once great property. Aha! they come!"

The steady tramp of feet could be heard on the stairs. White to the lips, Sanderson dashed towards the door while Angel's mirthless laugh sounded in his ears.

The instant Sanderson tore the door wide open an awful change came over him; his jaw dropped, his hair seemed to rise; a hoarse, gurgling cry rattled half-stifled in his throat, and a voice that made his flesh creep, cried:

"Back!"

Back he went step by step, and amidst a flood of light two figures entered the room. No specters arising from the grave could have paralyzed him more with deadly terror than these.

"My God!" he cried. "Come to life—come to life!" and then, with a great wailing scream, he threw up his arms and fell dead.

Even the pistol dropped from Angel's grasp as he turned and beheld the new-comer.

"Gregory!" he cried. "Mr. Drake!"

"Ay, scoundrel, Gregory in the flesh!" bawled the old fellow, drawing a sword and rushing forward.

"Not long to live!" cried Angel, but before he could raise his weapon, Uncle Gregory had cut him down.

Then came a great rush, and the room was peopled with armed men.

"Mother!" cried a voice.

"My son! Tom—Tom!"

"Yes, mother," said our hero, kneeling, "here at last. God be praised—God be praised!"

"Eh!" shouted old Gregory. "My boy—God bless you! Where—where is Minnie—my Minnie?"

"Safe, uncle, in America."

"My Minnie Atherton?"

"No uncle, my Minnie Drake. But enough now, let us away from here. Duty calls me to my post, no longer a rover, but a commander in the American navy. I can hold up my head, mother, among the proudest.

* * * * *
Happy and glorious was the reunion between Minnie, her uncle, and her mother-in-law. The only one drop of bitterness in the great cup full of happiness was the memory that her gallant young husband was soon to leave them to face America's bitterest enemy.

"Ah, Tom!" she cried, as he entered in his new uniform. "And you must leave us?"

"Yes, my pet, for a time. I've read my commission, and in five days we sail—a new world opens up to me. A new life begins from to-day, my love, and you shall yet live to be proud of the name of CAPTAIN TOM DRAKE."

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